

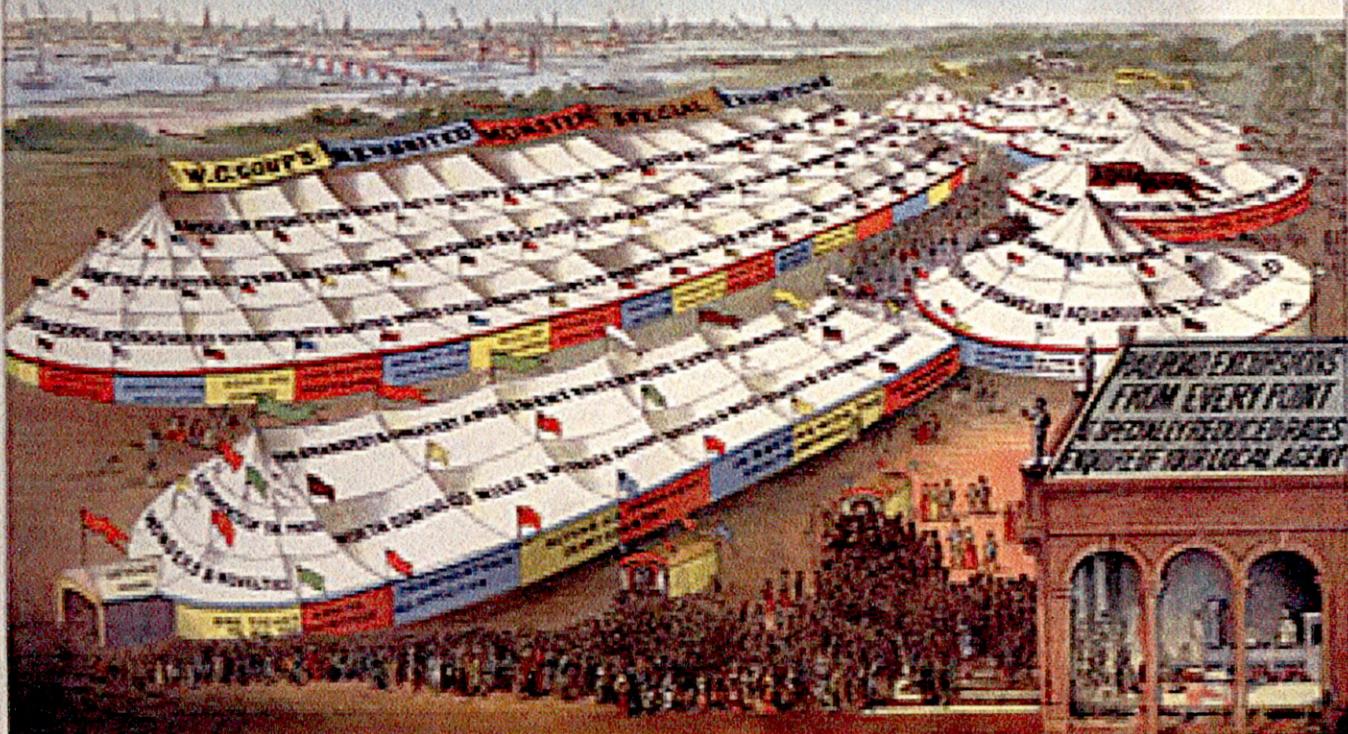
BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2006

THE W.C. COUP'S NEW UNITED MONSTER SHOWS.

BRING YOUR WIVES, CHILDREN OR SWEETHEARTS. REFINED & INSTRUCTIVE. EVERYBODY PLEASED - NONE OFFENDED.



NEW YORK AQUARIUM, WONDERFUL BRONCHO HORSES, ROYAL JAPANESE CIRCUS, MELVILLE'S AUSTRALIAN CIRCUS,
COLVIN'S GREAT MENAGERIE, FRYER'S STARTLING TRAINED ANIMALS AND WOOD'S MUSEUM.

BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Vol. 50, No. 1

FRED D. PFENING, JR.

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2006
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Bandwagon, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968), is published bi-monthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc., 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691. Periodicals Postage Paid at Columbus, OH. Postmaster: Send address changes to Bandwagon, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691.

Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221. Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$100, half page \$60, quarter page \$35. Minimum ad \$25.

Bandwagon, new membership and subscription rate: \$42.00 per year in the United States; \$46.00 per year in Canada and outside United States. Single copies \$4.00 plus \$2 postage. Please direct all concerns regarding address changes and lack of delivery to the editor.

CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. <http://circushistory.org>. Robert F. Sabia, President, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185. Judith Griffin, Vice President, 519 N. Union St., Appleton, WI 54911-5031. Alan Campbell, Secretary-Treasurer, 600 Kings Peak Dr., Alpharetta, GA 30022-7844.

Trustees: Alan Campbell, 600 Kings Peak Dr., Alpharetta, GA 30022-7844. Judith Griffin, 519 N. Union St., Appleton, WI 54911-5031. Fred Dahlinger, Jr., 451 Roblee Rd., Baraboo, WI 53913; John McConnell, 1 Skyline Dr., Morristown, NJ 07960; Fred D. Pfening, Jr., 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221; Fred D. Pfening III, 1075 W. Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212; John F. Polacsek, 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, MI 48236; Richard J. Reynolds III, 1186 Warrenhall Lane N.E., Atlanta, GA 30319; Robert F. Sabia, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185; Al Stencell, 15 Lark St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4L-3M5. Trustee Emeritus: Stuart L. Thayer.

THE FRONT COVER

William C. Coup was one of the greatest circus executives ever. His converting the huge Barnum circus from a wagon-conveyed to a railroad enterprise in 1872 is arguably the outdoor show business's most revolutionary technological innovation. Coup never recaptured the glory of those halcyon days from 1871 to 1875 when he, Dan Castello, and P. T. Bamum troupes one of the most profitable circuses in history. After an unhappy and unsuccessful venture in the fish exhibition business, he framed his own show, W. C. Coup's New United Monster Shows, which toured from 1878 to 1882. This great Strobridge lithograph, emphasizing both the size and gentility of the company, dates from that period. Image courtesy of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

THE BACK COVER

The 1905 Barnum & Bailey Circus courier was titled the Realm Of Marvels. It contained 64 pages and was loaded with photographs. Thousands of these were distributed in each city the show played. It is from the Pfening Archives.

BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966-Jan.-Feb.
1967-Nov.-Dec.
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1972-All available.
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1975-All available.
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.
1978-All available.
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.
1980-1986-All available.
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.
1988-2004-All available.

In addition to above many other issues are available going back to the 1950s. If you are in need of early issues write to the Editor.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$2.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES
2515 DORSET RD.
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

included the first Circus Wagon History File by Joe Bradbury, a listing of the 1907 Buffalo Bill program, a piece on Ringling veterinarian Doc Henderson, three obituaries, and numerous one and two paragraph blurbs, most about the organization's members. The only photo was on the cover.

By the end of 1957 the magazine had grown to twelve pages. The twenty-eight page November-December 1958 issue was the biggest to that time. By then, *Bandwagon* was printed on coated paper stock with clear photo engravings. The March-April 1960 issue was the first with a four color cover. A treasurer's report published in the September-October 1960 issue showed \$3617.16 income for the fiscal year and \$3314.37 in expenses.

The July-August 1961 issue was the last edited by King or printed by Robert King, her husband. The September-October issue was not published due to financial difficulties at Bob King's printing company in Richmond, Indiana.

Fred D. Pfening, Jr., then CHS president, assumed editorial responsibility with the September-October-November 1961 issue. A December issue followed, and for the next 45 years, every other month, he has continued to edit his beloved *Bandwagon*. Fred D. Pfening III

SPADER JOHNSON

A Survey of the Famous Clown's Career

By Tom Parkinson

This article was written for Alan Slifka in September 1982. Mr. Slifka kindly allowed it to be published here.

ORIGINS AND IDENTITY

It might have been Moses Brown who brought so much laughter to audiences throughout almost fifty years in show business. Moses was born on March 4, 1862, the tenth child in a family that eventually numbered five boys and eight girls. Their parents were of Canadian origins but lived at Glens Falls, New York. His father, Edward Brown, was away on duty with the federal army at the time this son was born. This baby was christened Moses but at the time of his first communion his name was changed to William.

Thus, it might have been that we would know this famous clown as Bill Brown. Circumstances in the future would make him known as Spader Johnson. With that identity he would become one of the most famous clowns in American circus history.

Growing up as Willie or Billy Brown, this youngster earned a reputation as a mean kid. It is a thin line between comedy and tragedy, between humor and cruelty. Perhaps his pranks could be seen as forerunners of the charades that Spader Johnson would create as hilarious clown routines. However, his parents and neighbors could have seen little humorous in those boyhood escapades.

By then the family had moved to Hudson Falls, New

York, near the Erie Canal. Showing off to other children, he stood repeatedly on a culvert as trains approached, jumping to safety only at the last minute, when strutting for his friends and laughing at the locomotive engineer's horrified expression. On other occasions he went swimming in the Erie Canal and acted as if he were drowning, sending his little sister into hysterics. She had been paralyzed by an earlier accident and was frantic when it seemed he was drowning and she was unable to

Moses Brown (aka) Spader Johnson began his career in show business with minstrels, including Haverly's United Mastodon Minstrels.

help. He threw the family goat out of a second story window, set a wheat field afire, and, by throwing a heavy bolt into the works, damaged the sawmill where his father was employed. Posed in a black bear rug, he terrified another sister. On one wintry day he walked several miles to where his brother served as coachman for the governor, and claimed the family was hungry and out of fuel because their father had lost his job. The older brother raced home to help, only to find that all was well at the Brown household. There were many more pranks and correspondingly little attention to school. On one wintry day, he left as if to go to school but went ice skating instead. Only because his suspicious father



checked up on him was there anyone present to rescue him when he fell through the thin ice. Relatives and neighbors were reluctant to let this boy slow down at their homes because to do so generally meant trouble. Maybe that is why the family moved. At South Bend, Massachusetts, his mother's hometown, the youngster got a factory job and at the same time learned to play the cornet and to clog dance. He taught himself to tumble by jumping off the barn and turning somersaults before landing in a haystack. At seventeen Billy Brown was ready for show business.

A NEW MINSTREL

It was not surprising that Spader Johnson, still known as William Brown, would launch his career in the minstrel field. He answered advertisement in a show trade paper, the *New York Clipper*, and joined the Duprez & Benedict Minstrels, with which he became a singer, dancer and musician. Duprez & Benedict was one of the most successful minstrel troupes in the country. The minstrel business had grown out of the circus business during the 1830s and 1840s. By the 1870s and 1880s, minstrelsy was challenged only by the circuses for popularity, success, and great numbers. Duprez & Benedict trouped for more than a decade as one of the top companies. Its 1879 recruit, however, did not make the full season. He was injured doing show-off somersaults at a saloon after the day's performance and spent eight weeks in a hospital. Later he joined a second troupe, but it soon failed. For 1880 he was back with Duprez & Benedict.

At an Albany, New York, theater, Brown's act was seen by Charles Frohman, later to become one of the great powers of American legitimate theater business, but then agent for Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels. As a result, Brown soon joined that illustrious company. Haverly's was the biggest name in minstrelsy at the time. Jack Haverly owned several minstrel shows as well as other theatrical companies. All of the men in a Haverly cast dressed alike on the streets, on trains, and in hotels, wearing a New York tailored suit, high silk hats and carrying canes.



Spader Johnson in formal attire around 1895. Pfening Archives.

The show tramped a heavy safe to convince the public this outfit had great resources.

Haverly hired William to replace an end man named Johnson, who had died. Rather than replace the printing and billing where his name appeared, it was easier to change the name of the new recruit. Thus, he who once was Moses Brown and then William Brown, now became William Johnson.

One of his acts in minstrel shows was to place twelve beer bottles strategically on stage, then standing on a shovel or spade, to hop between the bottles in time to music. All this was called a spade dance. All that led to Jack Haverly's nicknaming his performer "Spader" Johnson, the name by which he was known thereafter.

Spader Johnson gained enough recognition in the minstrel business that other companies, advertising for performers, sometimes asked in their ads that Spader Johnson reply. Apparently, however, he spent most, if not all of the time from 1881 through 1889 with Haverly's Minstrels, gaining that new name some degree of fame.

A CLOWN EMERGES

It was a logical transition for Spader Johnson to move into the circus business. Among more recent circuses, the so-called concert had

been a Wild West show, but through much more of circus history the after-piece has been either vaudeville, minstrels, or a combination of the two. Thus, Lewis Sells, part owner and manager of Sells Bros. Circus, needed minstrel people for his concert. He went on a recruiting mission in Chicago to see what acts were available when Haverly's ended its season. He found Spader Johnson in a restaurant and hired him for the minstrelsy after-show to be with Sells Bros. Circus in 1890.

The Sells brothers began as auctioneers, sending wagonloads of merchandise into towns on circus day to benefit from the big crowds and holiday spirit. They began their own circus in 1872 and soon graduated two performers, James Anderson and Al. G. Fields, who left to join Ben Wallace in starting the Great Wallace Circus. When Wallace bought them out, Fields started the Al G. Fields Minstrel Company, best known and perhaps longest lived of all the minstrel shows.

By 1890 Sells Bros. Circus moved on 31 railroad cars. That included eight cars for horses and two more for elephants, but only four coaches into which to crowd all of the circus personnel, among them the Mikado Troupe of Yeddo Japanese Acrobats and a minstrel now known as Spader Johnson. Continuing his concert assignment, he also became a Roman standing rider and began experimenting in clowning. He was off on the career in which he would gain his greatest fame.

CIRCUS SUCCESSES

While Spader Johnson was moving through the minstrel business toward a circus career, the girl who would become his wife was enjoying life with touring vaudeville and burlesque companies. The child who would become Minnie Johnson was born in 1871 at tiny Louisville, Illinois, a county seat where her father practiced law. Her mother had been a music teacher. The family moved to Lawrenceville, where her father died in 1882. The next few years brought what she later described as a tragic childhood and conflict with her mother. She also would later recall their seeing Barnum & Bailey at Vincennes,

Indiana, and seeing Haverly's Minstrels with Spader Johnson at Peoria, Illinois, all before she entered show business or knew him. Answering a Chicago ad in 1887, she went on the road with the V. K. Victor Vaudeville Company, an outfit which studiously avoided paying any of its cast members. It ran a standing ad in the *New York Clipper* for replacements. While most people stayed only until they realized no salary was forthcoming, Minnie and two friends, needing little or no money, stayed on for what they considered to be a lark. Subsequently, she was with a burlesque company, then the Wilber Opera Company, and next the Eddie Foy Show, always in the chorus line. At Chicago in 1890, there was another ad, another show, this time for singers and dancers to join the massive spectacle company which Imre Kiralfy produced for the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Kiralfy would become famous for his spectacles. In 1890 the big spec was called "Nero and the Destruction of Rome." It had been introduced during the winter season of 1889-90, when Barnum & Bailey made its first invasion of London. Now this big circus and spectacle was playing the United States. Originally, the first line of Kiralfy's chorus was comprised of Italian ballet dancers and subsequent lines were chorus girls from England. By the time Barnum & Bailey reached Chicago, there were several vacancies, thus the ad by which Minnie became a chorus girl in the spectacle at \$8.00 per week. She stayed on for the season of 1891. Since as a Kiralfy girl she was not required to go in the circus street parade, and since most experienced circus people despised parade duty, Minnie had the time and opportunity to establish a second career-substituting for others in the parade for a fee. More important, she learned to ride in the races. In that era, nearly every circus performance ended with a series of such contests. There were chariot races, flat races, camel races, but also such equestrian feats as Roman standing races. Circus contracts then and now call for performers to make themselves generally useful. Often that meant they would learn new stunts or make added appearances to

increase the number of people in spectacles, aerial ballets, and other production numbers.

It was on Barnum & Bailey in 1891 that Minnie and Spader Johnson became acquainted and ultimately married. They returned to Barnum & Bailey in 1892, but Minnie Johnson made only the Madison Square Garden appearance, then went to live with Spader's mother to await the birth of their child. Later in the 1892 season, several clowns, led by Spader, played a practical joke on an English performer which caused Spader to believe he would not be invited back to Barnum & Bailey.

Thus in 1893, he and his wife joined Sells Bros. Circus. He was a clown; she rode in the races. He and a partner did a burlesque version of the Gilbert statue act in which participants were covered with gold, silver or white paint and assumed a series of poses to depict various famous statues around the world. For the races, performers not otherwise occupied were required to don red coats and stand all around the hippodrome track to assist in case of accident. On one occasion, Minnie's horse fell. Spader and one of the red-coated performers pulled her out of the jumble, but there was added excitement

Johnson on Barnum and Bailey in 1905. Pfening Archives.



when someone from the audience leaped up and pulled a gun to protect the fallen equestrienne from whomever these assisters, or attackers, might be.

Their 1894 season on the Sells show was marked with more conflict and jealousy. In that era, clowns were permitted or encouraged to make appearances at any time and during any act in the big top. Later they would be restricted to certain times and places, but not at this point. Polly Lee was a famous bareback rider, whom the Johnsons and others felt was past her prime and subject to tumbles. Her husband blamed the clowns, saying that they caused her horse to shy. At one point, as a result, he attacked Spader Johnson but the clown beat up the bareback rider. Meanwhile, Minnie Johnson was asked to take over the coveted position of riding a tandem horse act. This resulted in a hair-pulling spat and argument among equestriennes in the ladies' dressing room.

It took Lewis Sells himself to stop the squabble. On the Sells show train, the Johnsons occupied an upper berth. Those occupying the lower berth declined to open the windows despite hot weather, so Johnson broke out the glass and it remained out for the season. In contrast, the season ran into December and the show was hit by an icy blizzard in

New Orleans. There was a violent competitive battle between the Sells and Ringling circuses as both played Texas territory. At year's end, the Johnsons wanted to get away from the Sells circus. They had to sign a contract for the following season in order to receive all of their current pay. On board a public train that would take them home but in view of Lewis Sells, Spader Johnson tore up the Sells contract and declared he never would return to that show.

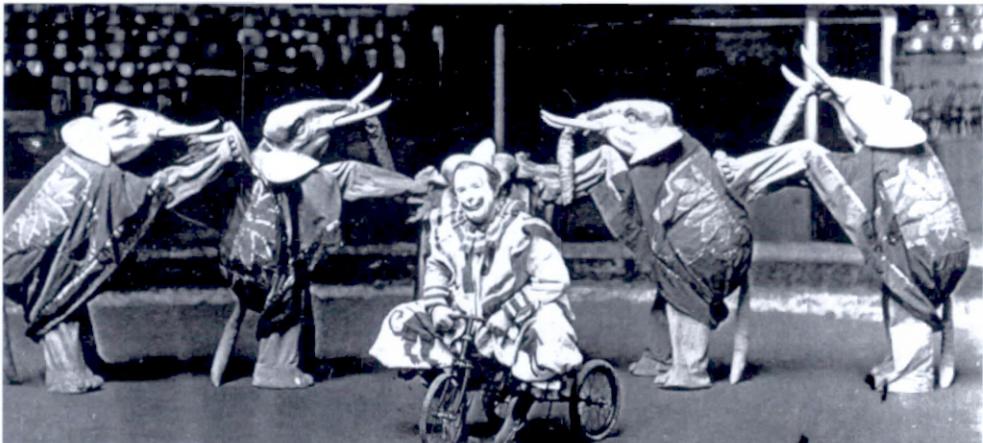
They went back to Barnum & Bailey, but the tensions were simular. Minnie Johnson managed to keep the pad room and women's dressing room in a turmoil, usually because she took on some added equestrienne appearance. This time the equestrian director, John O'Brien, asked Minnie to take over, on opening night, from another

rider who had been expected to appear with a pirouetting high school horse. A severe old wardrobe mistress had hoped her step-daughter would get the assignment and now was resentful. Minnie carried off the difficult assignment and continued the act for the season, despite difficulties that first night. It seems that someone had tampered with the saddle so it might slip to one side and throw the rider.

Minnie survived the dirty work, but the boss hostler and Mrs. White, the wardrobe mistress, were severely reprimanded. It seems that James A. Bailey himself witnessed the event from some unseen hiding place and realized what had happened.

Meanwhile Spader Johnson had perfected his clowning. He made many entrees during each performance. He was the champion among clown leapers, in which clowns in turn ran down a ramp-way, hit a springboard, and dived over the back of an elephant or several horses. They returned to repeat the stunt and each time more elephants or horses were added. Champion leapers added somersaults and other acrobatics as they flew over the backs of elephants and landed on big puff pads. Johnson also was the show's best Roman standing rider. They were now assigned a lower berth on the show train, a sign of prestige. And more, one of the show's posters depicted Minnie, the

Another Johnson clown production. Circus World Museum.



Johnson's clown production with fellow clowns dressed as elephants on Barnum and Bailey. Circus World Museum.

equestrienne, with her arms around Spader, the clown. The Johnsons felt they had achieved circus success.

Some sources claim that in 1895, Spader Johnson introduced the clown firehouse as his principal production number of the season. That seems unlikely. Other sources claim the firehouse gag was originated by another clown, Jim Rutherford, about 1912 or 1913, and that even before that the stunt was produced on the Neil O'Brien Minstrel Show.

About this time, however, Johnson introduced a hilarious clown number in which he pantomimed a political orator. Back in his minstrel show days, Johnson would have witnessed a generic form of comedy called The Stump Speaker, or The Stump Speech, in which an end man depicted a black person giving a flowery speech and misusing many fancy words. Away from minstrel shows, the stump speaker might be white and might rely on other kinds of comedy. Now, on the circus, Spader Johnson would recall those acts of an earlier era and the gestures to go with them. His version was in pantomime, omitting the big words wrongly used or mispronounced. This was the time of William Jennings Bryan and his famous oratory, in-

cluding the Crown of Gold speech about free silver. Most accounts declare that Johnson pantomimed the Bryan style.

This raises the interesting question of mixing politics with clowning. Many veteran professional clowns, including an old-timer who commented to me about the subject some forty years ago, believed that clowns should avoid political issues. They also extended the concept to declare that no entertainer should mix his act, comedy or otherwise, with political commentary or issues of the day. Some current observers believe that in the 1980s various comedians and other performers would do well to avoid mixing their efforts at entertainment with politics. Apparently Spader Johnson and Barnum & Bailey believed that his act was either non-partisan or that audiences as well as politicians were fair game. Minnie Johnson was to observe later that Spader's pantomime speech had "the Republicans rolling in the aisle one minute and the Democrats the next."

Despite Spader Johnson's status on the show, another unfortunate incident took place. One morning in the car, Spader found a vest on the floor and held it up to ask who claimed it. A Hungarian acrobat said it was his. Later the acrobat reported to James A. Bailey that the vest pocket had contained his wages but that Johnson had stolen the money. Bailey called Johnson on the carpet and indicated he believed the story. The Johnsons were insulted and prepared to move to the Walter L. Main Circus. However, the other performers petitioned Bailey to disavow the charges and keep the Johnsons. This



was done. At the end of the season, notice was posted for those who wished to return for another year to meet with Mr. Bailey at the office wagon. When Spader Johnson made no such move, Bailey sent for him. Spader reported they would be joining Ringling Bros. Circus, Bailey's prime competition. He indicated the thievery incident still rankled him and that the Ringlings would pay twice the wage he had received with Barnum & Bailey.

In his clowning career, Spader Johnson frequently was paid substantially more than other clowns, even some very well known personalities. Part of this was because the salary also included his wife's participation in the races or manege act. It also included his work in Roman standing riding or other races. Primarily, however, it was because of his status as a clown.

In 1900, for example, Spader and Minnie Johnson together received \$65.00 a week from Ringling. At the same time, such a well-known clown as Jules Turnour received \$20.00. In 1911, Spader Johnson contracted with Ringling Bros. for general clowning and appearance in the parade for \$50.00 per week. His contract for 1913 provided the same pay and called for "general clowning, furnishing props and first-class wardrobe, go in spectacle tournament parade. Lead clown band, play cornet in same." Al Ringling signed the contract.

In that period, Johnson's many fellow clowns on the show included Arthur Borella, George Hartzell, Roy McDonald, Al Miaco, Danny McBride, Ed Nemo, Al White, John Tripp, Jules Turnour, and the three Mardo brothers, Pete, Tom and Grover.

Ten years later on the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show of 1922, the circus program claimed 80 clowns and listed more than 40 by name. Among those whose names still are well-known were Felix Adler, Buck Baker, Roy Barrett, Charlie Cheer, Gene Dekoe, Tom and Everett Hart, the Three Jungs, the Three Harddigs, Jack LaClair, Willie Moser and Pat Valdo, as well as several from the 1912 list. Valdo later became performance director and

ultimately the chief executive of all performing talent with the Ringling circuses.

Charles Ringling succeeded his brother, Al in the contracting role and the contract with Johnson for the season of 1926 provided for "general clowning throughout the circus performance as may be directed



Johnson, fourth from right, with his clown band on Ringling Bros. in 1897. Pfening Archives.

by the employers." That meant "to produce good clown numbers and entrees, work during riding stops, and have a good stunt for the clowns, crazy number" as well as "to work with other clowns in the production of numbers, to play cornet in clown band. Also to do the following gags: the walk-away boy out of box; telescope man; telescope horse, buggy and burlesque lady driver; and Dr.

A group of 1917 Ringling clowns. Jack LeClair is on right in the first row. Jackie LeClair collection.



Pill Garlic in the crazy number." The salary was \$55.00 per week.

CLOWNING TO BLACKS

In his 1953 book, *The Big Top* Fred Bradna, the great equestrian director, identifies Spader Johnson as one of the half dozen greatest clowns in his experience.

Bradna wrote, "In the South, where the Negroes were segregated, Johnson worked for them alone, although he was himself a white man, a Canadian. He picked up children and spanked them, took the red ribbons from the hair of little girls, and in exchange gave them putty noses.

"He established rapport with these segregated people and made them feel that, while others might ignore them, he cared for no other audience, that they alone were worthy of his art. They responded with shattering applause and great love and would come to the back yard in great numbers, just to look at him silently. The stunt they loved best was when he

walked along the track, tripped himself, turned a forward somersault, and simultaneously opened an umbrella."

On circuses, in general, there was often substantially less racial problems than in the overall population.

Circuses always included blacks. There were many black workmen and numerous black performers, among them leading elephant trainers, star bare back riders, and others. Circuses usually included people of widely varied racial backgrounds. Show people were accustomed to working with and living close to others of various nationalities and racial origins.

In the same era, racial factors among the general population varied in the several parts of the country. Segregation was the norm in the South and the circus, as well as all other shows and businesses, conformed with local practice. Thus, when the circus played Southern cities the black customers would be seated together in a specific part of the tent. It is possible that one or more clowns might make an extra effort in playing to the black sections of the audience.

Whether Spader Johnson handled this any differently than other clowns is somewhat doubtful. Years of general clowning and early experience in minstrel shows undoubtedly gave Johnson insight into playing to black audiences. Undoubtedly he was as successful as Bradna recalled. But this same success probably extended to a number of clowns and to clowning in general. There is no other surviving evidence that Johnson stood apart in this matter.

Merle Evans was the circus bandmaster of the time. He and Fred Bradna were the two people who paid closest attention to every detail of each performance. Evans recently stated, "I knew Spader Johnson very well. He led the clown band and was a good cornet player. He was, I would say, the best clown that we had in the early 1920s on the show.

"He would get up on a ticket box and pantomime William Jennings Bryan and he would go big...I don't know about working with the blacks.



Johnson with his "Brainstorm" auto on Sells-Floto. in 1910. Pfening Archives.

Eddie Nemo worked the blacks in the South and went over big."

In the normal operation of the circus performance, the equestrian director would control how the clowns carried out their assignments. The great probability is that one performance would be almost identical to any other and that neither the clowns nor the equestrian director would likely amend things, particularly late in the season. In a clown walk-around, each man would be expected to move along the hippodrome track, repeating his gag every few yards. This would not seem to permit much special work for the

Johnson in a variation of his makeup. Pfening Archives.



black section of the audience any more than any other section. If this were done it would be because of Johnson's particular role in the early twenties, by which he held some privileges not extended to other clowns.

It seems significant that, apart from Bradna's, no other record of Spader Johnson's career makes any mention of this appeal to black audiences. In all, it seems likely that black audiences responded well to many clowns and that Spader Johnson was a leader among them.

THE CLOWN BAND

Among all of Spader Johnson's achievements none was greater than his perfection of the clown band. One wonders how clowns could have avoided producing a clown band until as late as 1897, but apparently that was the case. It appears that no one thought of the idea any earlier.

The Ringling Bros. route book of 1897 includes a illustrated article about the clown band and declares it was invented then and there by Johnson. The article refers to the "cornet virtuoso, that greatest of all living leaders, Spaderowski Johnsonicola." It goes on for several pages about the clown band. A photograph shows some nine members, its leader, Spader Johnson. Also listed in that Ringling Bros. 1897 band of clowns are George Bickel and Harry Watson, Jr. Bickel and Watson comprised a clown team which later gained some fame in vaudeville. Some accounts credit them with inventing the clown band. In the early 1930s, Bickel and Watson were with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, and that show's printed program one season credited them with originating the clown band.

All available evidence considered, however, it seems more likely that Johnson deserves the credit and that the other two took part in that stellar musical event.

The clown band has been duplicated in dozens, or perhaps on hundreds, of circus programs since. The idea has been picked up as well by



Johnson on Ringling-Barnum in 1921. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Glasier collection.

non-professional groups such as American Legion posts and school bands. Other circus clowns, including Earl Shipley, have added to the original number. A clown band also became a standard part of every circus street parade.

Prospects for an extended tour of Europe attracted Spader and Minnie Johnson back to Barnum & Bailey for 1898 and 1899, when it toured Europe.

The couple and their child returned to the United States for the 1900 season with Ringling Bros. Circus. They returned to Europe and Barnum & Bailey for 1901, joining the show at Vienna and remaining for the 1902 season in France. Their daughter, Neta, worked with Johnson in a clown gag that had him as a nursemaid and her as a baby who seemed to drink five gallons of milk in seconds.

Johnson and his family stayed with Barnum & Bailey until about a year after the death of James A. Bailey, at which time interim management proposed general salary cuts. The Johnsons switched to Sells-Floto rather than accept such a reduction. In that period, Ringling

Bros. acquired the Barnum & Bailey show but continued to operate it as a separate unit. Meanwhile, Sells-Floto had grown to a respectable size and began to taunt Ringling Bros.

The Johnsons joined Sells-Floto just at the time it was growing most. When they compared it to Barnum & Bailey, they found Sells-Floto lacking. However, the Floto show would overcome those deficiencies in time.

From about 1910 to 1920 Spader Johnson mixed his

circus engagements with various efforts to develop a vaudeville attraction. He also played burlesque and other forms of show business. He was with Sells-Floto in 1910, Ringling Bros. for the next three years, and then back with Sells-Floto. He toured with Barnum & Bailey for 1915 and 1917

His vaudeville act was called The Corncob Cut-Ups. Apparently it was made up of several of his established clown routines. There were about eight clowns in the act, and the routine included Johnson's clown automobile and the clown band, among others. In the same period, Johnson played winter dates for Shrine circuses.

At a chance meeting between Spader and John Ringling on a New York street, the circus king encouraged the clown to return to the Greatest Show on Earth. Spader was with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows for the seasons of 1921 through 1927. At that point, however, John Ringling, unimpressed with solo clowns anyway, ed Spader's gags weren't fresh and funny enough. Johnson went back to Sells-Floto, for what proved to be his final season in circus business, 1928.

Johnson claimed a record of introducing a highly successful new clown production number each season. As a



Slivers Oakley was Johnson's biggest rival. Pfening Archives.

producing clown, he was charged with creating such gags. The Ringling show line-up included several producing clowns and competition among them was intense.

In 1907, Johnson introduced a new automobile gag. Surviving descriptions of it leave something to be desired, but apparently it involved a prop automobile powered by two hidden clowns. In it, Spader "drives" to the center ring where the engine dies. Spader hops out to find what's wrong. To restart the engine, he turns the crank. There's an awful explosion and the car comes apart, with each of the hidden clowns taking his part off in a different direction. In 1907 automobiles were a new rage and the auto clown gag was a roaring success. It was continued for many years.

But on opening night there was a problem. This stunt was introduced in March, 1907, when Barnum & Bailey opened at Madison Square Garden. The new clown stunt was well received by the audience. Then, like Broadway stars, the circus people awaited the newspaper reviews. Those, too, thought the act was funny.

But, with one exception, all of the

New York papers gave credit--not to Spader Johnson--but to his archrival, Slivers Oakley.

Within circus business, of course, everyone knew the stunt was Spader's. For the public, those New York newspapers attempted to set the record straight and described the scene when the two star clowns met the next day in Clown Alley. The news accounts told of forgiveness and good fellowship, which probably didn't actually exist on that occasion.

SOLO CLOWNS

In both arenas and big tops by the 20th century solo clowns were a rarity. Usually only three names are mentioned, Marcelline, Slivers Oakley, and Spader Johnson.

Among the earliest circuses there was an established trio, comprised of the bareback rider, the equestrian director, and the talking clown. These were the principal participants in the performance. A circus might have only a single principal clown. In his own main appearance in the show, the clown told jokes and sang songs and performed pantomimes. The equestrian director served as his straight man. Among his other appearances, the clown also worked with the equestrian director and principal rider. This involved so-called clown stops. With the equestrian director (or ringmaster) taking part, the principal rider would perform his routine, some of which was strenuous. It might include somersaults from horse to horse, for example. As the rider proceeded through his bareback routine, he would perform a stunt and then take time to catch his breath.

That was a clown stop. The clown would perform some routine then to fill the time. This might be banter with the equestrian director, the rider, or as a monologue. Then the clown backed off and the rider resumed the act.

As big tops became larger, and particularly, longer,



Mr. and Mrs. Spader Johnson.
Pfening Archives.

talking clowns were less practical. Singing clowns also disappeared. About 1910 there were group singing stints by clowns on some smaller railroad circuses. Perhaps they were the last gasp of the singing clown. In place of talking and singing clowns, there came to be

Johnson on Sells-Floto around 1914. Pfening Archives.



some clown production numbers in the rings. There also were clown walk-around numbers, in which the joeys were expected to perform quick sight gags every few yards as they proceeded around the hippodrome track. Often clown gags, either in the ring or on the track, were scheduled in the performance run-down to create time for major changes in rigging. They might allow time for the removal of the wild animal arena, or installation of the rigging for the flying return act. A clown routine which could modify this set of circumstances was something special indeed.

Marcelline was famous in Europe where clowns still worked alone in one ring buildings. In this country he apparently was lost in the huge big tops and arenas where he worked with 25 or 30 other clowns at the same time. His stint with Sells-Floto was unsuccessful and a major disappointment. It was not until he moved to the New York Hippodrome that Marcelline made any kind of impression on the American public.

Slivers Oakley, on the other hand, was a product of American circuses. Beginning as a contortionist and bareback rider, he developed a comedy act in which he did a burlesque of a lady principal bareback rider.

On the Forepaugh-Sells Circus of 1900, Sam Bennett worked a comedy mule act in one end ring, while in the other was "Mr. Oakley, burlesque riding by Spangellata Slivers." In 1901, the same show's courier listed Oakley among the clowns, but more attention was given to "Frank Oakley, burlesque queen of the arena, in his side-splitting travesty upon prima donna ballerina of the arena." A year later, the Forepaugh-Sells publicity still was talking about Frank Oakley's burlesque bareback routine. In boasting of "23

star riders of the world;" it included Frank Oakley among the bareback riders.

But now it also talked about "Slivers--that is his only name before the public, but he is by all odds the king of clowns. He is the funniest fool alive. Laughter lives at his house and is always heard with him."

When Barnum & Bailey returned from Europe, Oakley joined, staying many years. It was there that he developed his famous one-man pantomime of a baseball game, the routine which won him solo status in the Barnum & Bailey performance. It may be the most acclaimed clown appearance in American circus history. Slivers came to Barnum & Bailey stardom while Spader frequently was on the same show. Johnson felt the competition and ridiculed Oakley for his lack of ability in the leaps, as well as in clowning.

In the early 1920s, the two surviving Ringling brothers, Charles and John, developed conflicting philosophies of operation in many phases of the circus. Earlier there were several brothers to cast votes, but in the 1920s there was no third Ringling to break the one-to-one tie. Mr. John and Mr. Charlie argued about clowning, among other things. Charles Ringling was directly responsible for the performance. He favored more time and attention for clowns, including the development of solo appearances. Mr. John, who began as a clown himself, believed that solo clown appearances slowed the overall pace of the performance and therefore should be eliminated. Meanwhile the equestrian director, Fred Bradna, decreed that clowns could appear only at predetermined spots in the performance and no longer were at liberty to turn up at will anywhere during the program. Particularly, they were not allowed to work simultaneously with major stars of the show.

Both Sliver Oakley and Marcelline brought extra time for their careers by playing the New York Hippodrome. However, Oakley was crushed when Barnum & Bailey discontinued his solo act in 1915 and offered to continue him only as a regular clown at

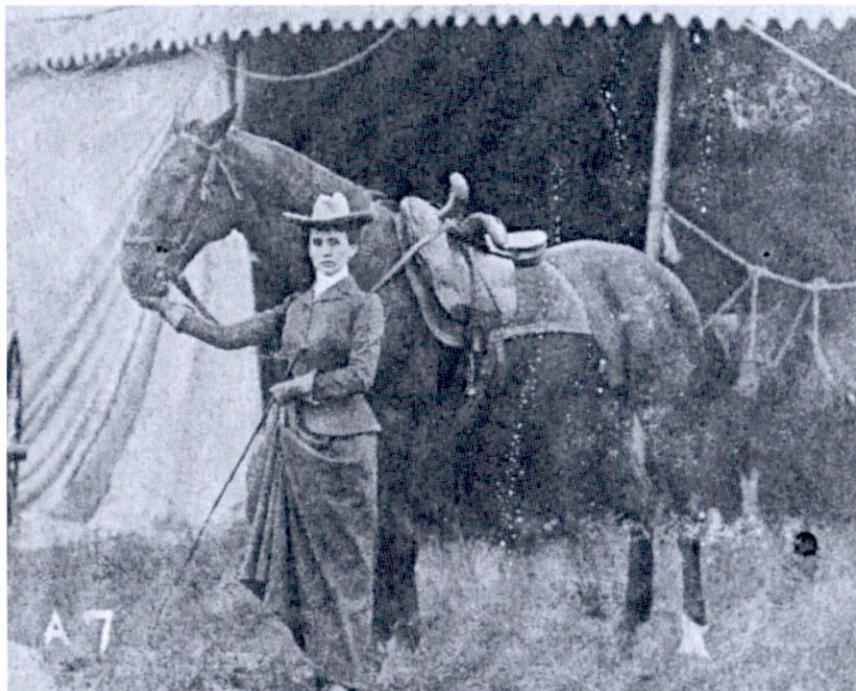


Spader Johnson
ORIGINATOR OF THE CLOWN BAND
— AND —
Originator and Producer
— OF THE —
BRAIN STORM AUTOMOBILE?
NEXT?

Johnson ran this ad in the *Billboard*. Pfening Archives.

routine pay. He committed suicide in a New York boarding house in March, 1916. In 1927, Marcelline, unable to get work, also committed suicide. At least among clowns accustomed to working star turns in solo

Minnie Johnson in her riding costume. Pfening Archives.



positions, the melancholy Pagliacci existed in real life.

Spader Johnson fell into the same category. He thrived as a clown who had a whole arena--the whole audience--to himself. In the pantomime of a political speaker, he seemed to have the world in his palm.

But it was a tough act to follow. Even if he could continue or equal that routine, both audiences and the circus changed. Mr. John personified that. It came to one devastating moment when the last Ringling told Spader it was time for him to go join one of the lesser shows and develop some new gags. Like Oakley and Marcelline, Johnson found it difficult to cope with the collapse of his career. But Johnson merely quit show business.

OFF THE ROAD

In his declining years, Johnson lived in New York City and spent most of his time as a coat-room operator at the Staten Island Elks Club. At the same time, he and Minnie Johnson served as managers of an apartment house. Johnson had been a member of the Elks Club for many years. This probably dated from his minstrel show experience. Minstrel people were the prime founders of the original Elks lodges,

so it seems probable that he was involved with the Elks from its inception.

During the Great Depression, the Staten Island Elks Lodge was forced to close. Johnson got a job as watchman on a pier but failing health forced him to quit and go on relief. Recurring pneumonia put Johnson in the hospital. For many years his career had been marked by an undercurrent of troublemaking. Even in the halcyon years between his being a mean kid and a cantankerous old man, Spader Johnson often was hard to get along with. Now, in the hospital, he knocked down a nurse, so he was sent to the psychopathic ward at Bellevue and on to Brentwood, Long Island, where he spent a year and a half. He and Minnie next resided in a city housing project. In 1943, Spader again became ill. For twenty days and nights Minnie Johnson tried to take care of him. But then both were sent to hospitals. At Bellevue again, he was in a coma for a week before he died. Minnie Johnson was too ill to attend the funeral.

Their daughter, Neta, had an extensive career in vaudeville and then retired to a California ranch with her husband. Minnie Johnson joined them in the 1940s. In the 1950's she again was living in the East where she visited circuses and corresponded with circus people, recalling her seasons as a star manege rider and the clowning career of Spader Johnson.

CONFLICTS

Spader Johnson's job happened to be clowning, a field obviously linked with humor and happiness. His career earned him some degree of fame but little measure of fortune.

He dealt in humor, yet his job was difficult and his life was tough. In education, income and life style, Johnson experienced the minimal and marginal. This is not to echo again the trite observation that the lives of clowns usually are tragic. It is more that all people in whatever walk of life probably find life tough. And in whatever strata or status, people experience difficulties. If one is a merchant or a mechanic his job is not linked with good humor; it isn't selling comedy. Happy or melancholy, he seems normal to others; they do

not associate mood with his working hours. Given a clown, the public first expects him to be in a happy state always so and when it finds even a clown's life is not always fun, it swings to the other extreme and assumes all clowns dwell in tragedy. Not necessarily so.

Yet, Johnson's life was sprinkled with conflict. Some of it seems to have been of his own making. Some would have occurred despite any circumstances he controlled.

There was professional rilvalry. This crops out from time to time in accounts of his contacts with other circus performers. It reaches a peak in his relationship with Slivers Oakley whose clowning career and private life approximated Johnson's.

There was conflict in working with others. Once he booked a route of vaudeville dates, hired several other clowns for the acts, and arranged for them to meet and launched their tour. He took baggage, wardrobe and scenery to Grand Central Station and awaited his cast at train time. But they never came. No reason became public. It may have been a misunderstanding. It may have been some kind of silent protest. He never explained it and may not have known the cause. The only guess was that the others resented abusive treatment from him and retaliated.

There were other clashes with an Hungaian acrobat, an aging bareback rider, his parents and school, others in a circus sleeping car, the Sells Floto Circus, and various circus owners.

The greatest conflict came in his private life. During the Barnum &

Bailey tour of Europe, Spader was rejected by his wife. She moved out of their London apartment. She objected to his coarse behavior but there seems to be no direct explanation of her complaint and its origins, although it probably involved drinking. Minnie Johnson packed up her beloved daughter and left. She found other rooms. Both Spader and Minnie continued their separate jobs with the circus but they lived apart. Spader tracked down the location of her rooms and moved in there. However, she relegated him to a cot in a separate room.

A another time Neta had a serious case of whooping cough. Spader came home, roaring and shouting. He caused Neta to wake up and go in to a spasm of coughing. Minnie objected to his noise and conduct. He knocked her down. In a rage, she seized a brass poker and struck him repeatedly. Later, with the six head wounds bandaged, he returned and interrupted a dinner party in progress. Neta told the guests what had happened. Spader was ordered out of the house by Minnie.

But the storm blew over. The couple survived the crisis and continued their marriage. Minnie complained of her mother and unhappy childhood, now she complained of Spader and a marriage in jeopardy. Her one delight was her daughter.

Despite all this they stayed together and in their advanced age, when fortunes declined further, she remained loyal. In his last illness, she attempted to care for him, even to the point of endangering her own health.

PLAN TO ATTEND THE 2006 CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION

IN SARASOTA, FLORIDA
MAY 4-8

Tommy Hanneford A Lifetime of Circus

By Greg Parkinson

Tommy Hanneford devoted seven decades to entertaining audiences. He performed in the ring for more than half a century. He produced and owned shows for 40 years. He greatly enjoyed these endeavors. So did the millions who saw his comic riding and American-style circus performances throughout his amazing career.

"For me there is no life without the circus," Tommy once said. "Circus is my life--I wouldn't trade it with anyone else in the world." And what a life it was.

Tommy Hanneford was born in 1927 in Ozone Park (Queens), New York where his mother's family lived. His father, William George Sanger Hanneford (1895-1972), was on the road that September nearing the end of a season with Sells-Floto Circus. George, as he was called, performed in one of the two famed Hanneford riding acts of the day. His brother, Poodles, headed the other.

Tommy's mother, Catherine Breen Hanneford (1892-1985), provided her

Tommy Hanneford posing on the Clyde Beatty Circus in 1955. Circus World Museum.

three children with their Irish heritage. The genealogy on the Hanneford side is somewhat more obscure. Family legend relates that a Hanneford performed as a foot juggler on the streets of London about the same time as Ricketts was introducing the circus to America. Some have speculated that this early Hanneford was of German descent.

In the years prior to their arrival in the United States the Hannefords tramped with circuses large and small in England, France, Ireland and elsewhere in Western Europe. It has often been noted how John Ringling saw the Hanneford act in Spain, and contracted them for the 1915 season with Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show On Earth. They arrived in New York in March, and debuted at Madison Square Garden on April 1. That was the beginning of the star-spangled Hanneford journey across America.

Five weeks after the Hanneford debut, a German U-boat sank the Lusitania and the United States began to prepare for its heroic role in the First World War. The Hannefords stayed with Barnum & Bailey throughout the war years. They continued working for the

Ringling brothers, appearing with their mammoth combined show in 1919. Seasons with the New York Hippodrome and Sells-Floto followed. George and Poodles developed separate riding acts in 1923, and in September that year George and Catherine welcomed their first son, George Jr.



Kay Frances and George Hanneford Sr. in the process of completing a pyramid with Tommy and George Jr. on Clyde Beatty in 1948. Circus World Museum.

Tommy Hanneford riding astride with Doris Wiron, George Jr. and George Hanneford Sr. on Hamid-Morton in 1941. Circus World Museum.





A four-horse pyramid anchored by Tommy Hanneford on an indoor date in the mid-1960s. Circus World Museum.

As the twenties roared forth, Tommy's father and uncle each played vaudeville and engagements with the biggest circuses in the country. The celebrity of the Hannefords was also advanced as Poodles appeared in several motion pictures

Tommy Hanneford (top) and George Jr. c-1944. Struppi Hanneford collection.



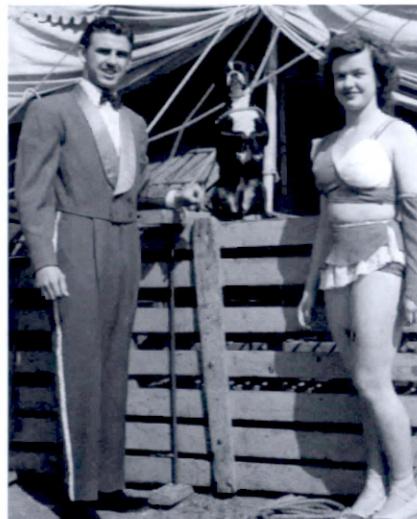
and theatrical productions.

George's riding act was contracted with Downie Bros. Circus for the 1929 season. His troupe returned to Downie for five more seasons beginning in 1932, and this became their base work during the mid-depression years. Tommy's sister, Catherine "Kay Francis" was born in February of 1933. Later that year, at age five, Tommy began his personal performing career. He entered the ring as a clown, just as he did again the following year.

In 1937, George signed on with another large truck show, the Tom Mix Circus. The route book for that season lists Tommy Hanneford as one of performers. Within this annual is a photograph of the show's personnel, and included in this image are George Hanneford and members of his family. Tommy was seen sporting a tuxedo, bow tie and a youthful smile. At a Fourth of July party between the matinee and night shows, Tommy helped organize a kids circus. "We sold tickets for a penny, and I imitated Tom Mix," Tommy later reflected. Foreshadowing events to follow, this was Tommy's earliest producing experience.

His formal education was limited to attending a one-room schoolhouse in Glens Falls, New York where his father and uncle built homes in the late 1930s. For those who know the story of the extended Hanneford family, just imagine Gracie Hanneford, Ernestine Clarke, and Tommy and George Jr. all in the same small classroom!

Tommy spent the school year in Glens Falls, and performed in his father's act during the summer. In 1938, George Hanneford was at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City. The next year they appeared in Vaudeville at the 44th Street Theater in New York. The riding act was booked on the Hamid-Morton Circus for the 1940 and 1941 seasons. By that time, Tommy and George Jr. had joined



Tommy, Kay Francis and their canine performer on Cole Bros. in 1949. Struppi Hanneford collection.

the family on a full-time basis. Next came a season with the Hunt Bros. Circus. From 1943 to 1946 the troupe worked for a host of different shows, Orrin Davenport Circus, Circo Atayde in Mexico, Hamid-Morton, Barnes Bros., Gil Gray Circus and

Pigtails for Kay Francis and wardrobe for the "Martells" gave them a different look than when they appeared in the program with the Hanneford backback act in 1943. Struppi Hanneford collection.





Tommy Hanneford's comic riding in the 1970s. Circus World Museum.

Clyde Bros. Among the most notably engagements were those with the Detroit Shrine Circus beginning in 1944 where Tommy performed in a lineup with some of the biggest stars of the era.

In 1946, Tommy was inducted into the Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He rose to the rank of staff sergeant. His assignment was to recruit entertainment for Pratt General Hospital in Miami. Following his discharge, he rejoined the family in East St. Louis, Illinois. With Tommy's return, his father set about creating an act that featured all three of his children including 14 year old Kay Francis. He asked Tommy to take over "the fur coat and derby hat" and to start doing the comic riding. George had been in that role since he branched off with his own act 24 years earlier.

Also in 1947, Tommy partnered with his sister and developed a rolla bolla act. They called themselves the Martells. Tommy was the bottom man on the rolla bolla board. Kay Francis was the top mounter. Their pedestal and props were rudimentary in nature, but their routine was solid. Formal wear for Tommy and a long-sleeve blouse, pants and pigtails for Kay gave the two a decidedly different appearance than the traditional costumes they wore for the bareback rid-

ing.

During the winter of 1947-1948, George Hanneford's family performed again with Atayde in Mexico. In the spring they joined Clyde Beatty Circus. Tommy began to experiment with his character, even going so far as to substitute colorful sport coats for the traditional Hanneford fur. It was also that season that Tommy began to regularly perform the horse-to-horse back somersault to a trailing horse.

Over the next three years, Tommy performed with his family on Cole Bros. (1949-1950), Clyde Bros. (1949), Frank L.

Wirth (1949), Orrin Davenport (1949-1951), Tom Packs (1951-1952) and Circo Atayde during the winters beginning in 1951. During this time Tommy perfected new tricks and routines for his fast-moving comedy. One of these was the head-first dive over a horse circling within the ring, a trick that was later modified to a jump over the horse landing in a seated position on a stationary rosin-back just outside the ring. Another was the coat swing-a-round. This was accomplished on the back of a fast finish horse, as Tommy appeared to desperately fight for his balance with flailing arms. The signature turn was the care-free, exaggerated "step off" that concluded the act.

The year 1952 marked the beginning of a three and a half year stretch with the Clyde Beatty Railroad Circus. George, Catherine,

The George Hanneford family riding act, Tommy seated in front, Polack Bros. Circus in 1949. Struppi Hanneford collection.



Kay Frances, Tommy, George Jr. with Mother and Father c-1952. Pfening Archives.

Tommy and Kay Francis shared a private car with the legendary wild animal man from Ohio (George Jr. and his young wife, Victoria, stayed in a coach reserved for married couples). In addition to the riding act, Tommy and Kay performed their rolla bolla. By that time it was a polished act featuring head-to-head balancing, club juggling and a small dog that made an appearance perched on Tommy's head.

Toward the end of his time with Clyde Beatty, Tommy served as an announcer, appearing in a red coat with tails. The Hannefords left Clyde Beatty Circus in 1955 after the big early season dates in the east. Soon thereafter, while playing one of Orrin Davenport's dates, Tommy began seeing Gertrude "Struppi" Zimmerman. Struppi was one of the two aerialists who comprised the remarkable Luvas act. The stunning 24 year-old from Germany and Tommy Hanneford were married on December 8, 1955.

The George Hanneford family found steady work on the Polack Bros. Circus eastern unit for four years beginning in 1956. They did several turns in the Polack program, but the bareback riding act was the stellar entry, as reported by *Billboard* writer Tom Parkinson in a 1958 issue: ". . . principal work

by Kay, take-off Elvis Presley by Tommy, and somersault by George Jr. mark this as the excellent riding troupe it is known to be. The simultaneous somersaults by which Tommy and George Jr. change horses is spectacular . . ."

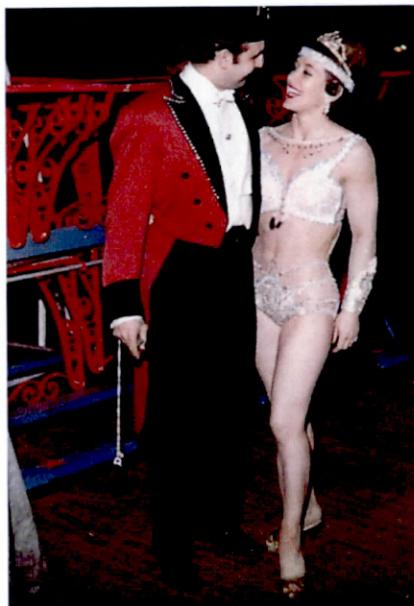
A long run with Dobritch International Circus extended from 1959 through 1967. Tommy Hanneford's comedy was featured in scores of major Shrine dates during those years. He also handled the role of equestrian director and announcer for many Shrine circuses.

Tommy's brother left his father's act in 1960 to form his own troupe. From 1962 through 1965 George Hanneford Jr. and his wife, Vickie, had their big act on the Ringling indoor circus. Tommy filled in for George for part of the 1965 season when George was injured. It was the only occasion Tommy ever performed on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. He did perform, however, with his father's act in John Ringling North's Continental Circus at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

In 1965, at Pleasure Island Park in Wakefield, Massachusetts, Tommy presented the first group of acts that he identified as the Royal Hanneford Circus. It had been a half a century since his family came to America, and longer still since the title had been used in Ireland. The program included Tommy's comic riding, Struppi's high wire act and canines presented by Kay Frances. The next year Tommy and George Jr. teamed up to offer a show at Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida. That year in Saginaw, Michigan, Tommy organized his first major fair date. Soon thereafter, with Tommy's growing interest in producing his own circus, he and Struppi acquired their first elephant, Ina, from Mac MacDonald.

The Royal Hanneford Circus toured in Canada for eight weeks in 1968 for Bill English, with Hanneford being paid a flat weekly fee. A similar arrangement was repeated in 1969. That year on July 24--just three days after the first moon landing--Kay Francis gave birth to a daughter she named Nellie.

Starting in 1970 Tommy partnered with Bill English, Glenn Parkins and



Tommy and Struppi Hanneford in 1963. Pfening Archives.

Art Concello. They formed Circus Classics, Inc. to tour the Royal Hanneford Circus. This affiliation continued for five years. During this time the Hanneford Circus began to grow. The show, of course, featured a big riding act. Nine tigers were purchased for Struppi to present.

After Circus Classics broke up in 1974, a female Asian elephant named Chandra was acquired from Bill English. A third elephant, Tina, was obtained in October from Southwick Animal Farm in Massachusetts. Trumpet was acquired the following year, bringing the Hanneford herd to a total of four Asian elephants.

In 1975, Tommy and Struppi went out with the reorganized Royal Hanneford Circus. They continuously operated the show for the next 30 years. In 1976, Tommy was success-

Nellie and Tommy in 2004. Struppi Hanneford collection.



ful in getting the contract to produce the Detroit Shrine Circus. This was a significant step forward for the prestige of the show. In the years that followed, there were times when Tommy had as many as five circuses performing at the same time. But 1976 was also a year of sadness, as Kay Francis died in November. Thereafter, her aunt and uncle raised Nellie Hanneford.

Royal Hanneford Circus played a season at Storytown USA in Glens Falls, New York in 1977, a homecoming of sorts for Tommy. Struppi continued to present the wild animal act. Tommy worked the performing elephants. And as Tommy approached his 50th birthday, he still did the comedy and acrobatics in the bareback act.

In November of 1978, Tommy auditioned Mark Karoly in Dothan, Alabama. Mark soon started to perform in the riding act. For a period of time, Mark and Tommy worked together. Tommy was the comedian who stumbled out of the audience, inadvertently getting his head lodged in a horse's hindquarters. Mark started to perform the somersaults. Tommy sold the riding act to Karoly in 1984. A couple of years later, Mark took over the presentation of the Royal Hanneford Circus elephants.

"The Riding Fool" appeared several times at The Big E in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Wayne McCary, President of the Eastern States Exposition remembers the last time that Tommy performed in the Coliseum Circus in the early 1980s: "In a Big E farewell tour performance, a capacity crowd rendered Tommy Hanneford an emotional response as he exited the Coliseum causing me to step outside the building and bring him back to the center

ring for an unprecedented 15 minute standing ovation, an accolade I have never known to be accorded any other star in the entertainment world."

Wayne McCary inaugurated The Big E Super Circus in 1989. His stated goal was to establish a tented circus at the exposition that would develop into "New England's circus of excellence." To do this, "We turned to none other



Tommy and Struppi in September 2005 at the Big E. Paul Gutheil photo.

than Tommy Hanneford who already enjoyed a reputation for his one-of-a-kind showmanship and a rare capacity to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary." Over the next 16 years, the Big E Super Circus played to more than a million people, and the Eastern States Exposition became one of Tommy's flagship dates.

Another such date for Tommy was the 15-year association he had with the Great Circus Parade presentation in Milwaukee. Circus World Museum contracted with Tommy Hanneford for its parade showgrounds circus each year beginning in 1988. Hanneford animals and costumed performers were also utilized in the street march, and nearly every year Tommy rode in the parade with Struppi (and often Nellie), proudly waving to the crowd from a horse-drawn carriage. In 2002 Tommy delivered two separate tented circuses at the Great Circus Parade showgrounds.

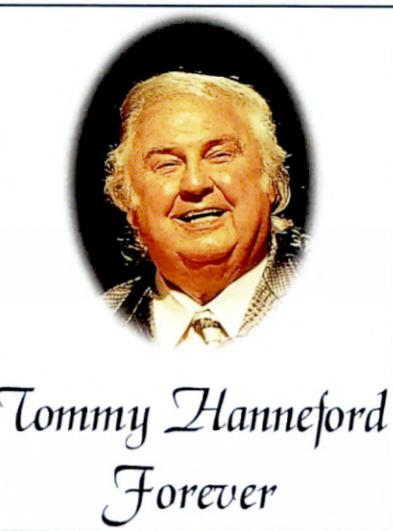
To celebrate the bicentennial of the American circus, Circus World Museum wanted Mark Karoly's riding act (then under exclusive contract with Tommy) and the Hanneford elephants for the summer season. In a telling letter to the museum's director, Tommy wrote, "Please give me just a little more time on the contract

for Mark. If I work this out, would I have the 1993 Parade contract?"

For more than three decades Tommy's circuses played large arenas and tented seasons. There were dates at fairs and festivals. There were seasons at attractions and theme parks. The locations and occasions are too numerous to cite. Likewise, the circus performers who Tommy helped to get established are too many to recount. But one stands out, Nellie Hanneford who Tommy and Struppi raised and adored. Nellie's many appearances in the Royal Hanneford Circus were diversified and always featured. Of course, her elegant principal riding and her classy liberty routines stand out.

The Royal Hanneford Circus was booked in conjunction with the Circus Fans Association convention on six separate occasions between 1990 and 2003. There were two CFA gatherings in Milwaukee in association with Circus World Museum's festival and parade (1990 and 2002), two in Sarasota (1992 and 2000), one in Baraboo (1994) and the most recent was in West Springfield at the Eastern States Exposition (2003). Every time, Tommy delivered a superb and highly entertaining show.

For the 1994 CIA convention in Baraboo, Tommy purchased a colorful tent made in Italy by Canobbio. It was set up on the parking lot just east of the Circus World Museum



main entrance. At the Royal Hanneford performance given for CFA members, Tommy made a surprise appearance in the ring. In the attire he had long before made famous, he sprang to the back of a cantering horse. Then he performed the coat swing-around routine for the very last time. There was a discernible gasp from the audience when he did the final "step off." Over 60 years had passed since Tommy had first heard the applause from within the sawdust ring.

Struppi recently commented that, "He was never very good with a screwdriver and that sort of thing, but he really knew how to put a show together." Indeed, Tommy had a genuine talent for producing circuses that were well paced and held the attention of the audience. His presentations often had a patriotic theme, reflecting his love of country. Throughout his long career as a circus rider, he combined remarkable acrobatics with comedy that kept up with the times and genuinely connected with the audience. His sense of timing was second to none. Arguably, Tommy Hanneford was "The Funniest Man on Horseback"--ever.

Born September 18, 1927. Died December 5, 2005. And in between, a phenomenal lifetime of circus for Thomas Robert Hanneford.

Sources Consulted

Billboard April 21, 1934.

English, Bill. "A Lifetime In Show Business, *Bandwagon*, September-October, 1995.

Hanneford, Tommy. Letter to Greg Parkinson, January 19, 1993.

Hanson, Dwight. Telephone interview, January, 2006.

McCary, Wayne. Tommy Hanneford eulogy delivered December 12, 2005.

McConnell, John H. *A Ring, a Horse and a Clown* Detroit: Astley & Ricketts, 1992.

McCuen, Sam E. "Average Boy's Dream Comes True--The Story of Circus Owner Tommy Hanneford - *White Tops*, May-June, 1988.

Parkinson, Thomas P., Review in *Billboard*, March 3, 1958.

And route books and programs in Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, WI.

THE GREAT JACKSONVILLE CIRCUS FIGHT

BY JOE O. PARKER

This paper was presented at the 2005 Circus Historical Society convention.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have a wild-west story for you. It features a gunfight, a hairbreadth escape, the U.S. Cavalry, riot, assault and the John Robinson Circus. It's a wild, wonderful story, and a lot of it is even true.

This story is about the relationship between the circuses and the towns and people they visited and entertained, their mutual suspicion, and the "Us vs. Them" attitude both showfolk and townsmen displayed.

In a nineteenth-century small town, the arrival of the circus created a holiday atmosphere. Everyone throughout the county tended to flow into the town for the show, and a festive spirit pervaded the community. Now this meant more revenue at the gate for the circus, more customers for the side shows and games, but also more occasions for men to get drunk and rowdy, and more opportunity for a small dispute between a showman and a citizen to escalate out of control. Fights between showmen and citizens, using fists, knives, clubs, even guns, occurred regularly, and circus crews were trained and equipped for the brawls.

For whatever reason, certain towns had the reputation for trouble. Jacksonville, Texas was such a town.

Jacksonville otherwise seemed like a typical town. It served the farmers in its section of the pine forest of East Texas. It began in 1847 with the home and blacksmith shop of Jackson Smith, who was the original postmaster in the community from 1848. About the same time, Dr. William Jackson built his home and practice nearby, so between the two community leaders, Dr. Jackson and Jackson Smith, the community was named

"Jacksonville" in 1850. By that time, the town had a primary school, a Masonic lodge, and Baptist and Methodist Churches.

In 1854, the Reynolds Circus raised the first show tent in the public square of Jacksonville, then on Gum Creek's east bank. The show's matinee performance went off without incident, but when time came for the night performance and people crowded to the main entrance, a drunk tried to enter without paying. He attempted to sneak under the tent, but a peace officer discovered the dodge, dragged the man out and gave him a whack on the head as a reminder not to try that again. Soon the culprit reappeared at the front door, brandishing a large knife and demanded to know who hit him. A young showman attempted to calm the malcontent by offering to escort

John Robinson, the founder of the John Robinson Circus. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



him inside the tent for free.

The drunk shouted, "Did you do it?" and without waiting for an answer drove the knife into the showman's neck. While the crowd's attention was focused on the dying man, the murderer escaped and was never seen again around Jacksonville.

The next recorded trouble with circuses came in the spring of 1870, when the Orton Circus came to Old Jacksonville. A known scofflaw named Matkins shot and killed a circus man. The slaying of the Northern showman intensified an on-going investigation by federal authorities in Tyler into the killing of a black man at Jacksonville.

Three weeks later another circus, the C. W. Noyes Show, came to town accompanied by federal soldiers disguised as showmen. As later revealed, this was calculated to discover and apprehend the killer of the Orton showman. The plan could not have worked better. A Lt. Bothwick, leading the Union forces, confronted Matkins and attempted to arrest him. Matkins fired at the officer, and was killed by the soldiers. Another local man, "Bill Smith" was shot off his horse and died, as well.

In 1872, the International-Great Northern (later named the Missouri Pacific) Railroad was built through the area. The town of Jacksonville moved a couple of miles to a location on the railroad, adding to the prosperity and importance of the town.

We now come to the main event, the story of that Saturday, November 22, 1873. I'm going to tell you three different versions of the tale, from three varied viewpoints.

John Robinson told version #1 of the "Greatest Circus Fight" to Harry Barnet, who published the story as one of a series on

Robinson's career, in the Dearborn *Independent* of April 2, 1921. His tale follows: "The most famous circus fight in history was our Jacksonville row. The day we showed there it was raw and cold and nasty. It seemed as though all our worst fights came on just such days — probably because everybody drank more when the weather was bad.

"We commenced to have a world of trouble with the rough element before we had the last wagon on the lot—we were traveling by train then—because they were all drunk and hunting a fight. When the afternoon show was started, three or four ruffians came over and sat in the ring, so the only part of the performance we could give was where we had no use for the horses.

"Finally, we used up all our trapeze and other acts, and wanted to bring in the horses. We did bring them. The rowdies persisted in interfering with them, and finally two of my men went into the ring, took the rowdies by their throats and their shoulders, walked them out of the ring and pushed them down on the lower tier of seats.

"Well, the performance went on, and these fellows commenced talking it over among themselves. One of them allowed that DeVere had choked him. There were many in the audience who sided against us. They wanted to kill the circus man for hurting one of their citizens. Of course, it was only a little while before things began to warm up, but we managed to get the performance finished, and the crowd went up town.

"The place didn't have over a hundred buildings in it, and two-thirds were bar rooms. When the rowdies got up town they commenced to drink. They soon had a crowd around them, and everybody began to drink. Finally, they concluded that they wanted to arrest DeVere, and they

got out a warrant for him. They didn't know his name, but that didn't make any difference.

"Then they came down to the cars hunting for DeVere. We took them all though the sleepers, and showed them he wasn't there. But they made a pretty good search for him, even to the extent of tearing out the berths. Of course, he wasn't there. We knew what it meant that afternoon, and we hid him out in the woods—stuck him down in a lot of brush, and told him to stay there until we came for him.

"We were to show there that night, but after these fellows went up town the second time they began to drink so hard, and raised the devil so thoroughly, I concluded we had better get out. Everything was packed and the wagons were down at the railroad, and the train was pretty well loaded, when four or five of these fellows came to the train.

"They yelled and whooped until they had a big crowd together. They kept calling for that 'big fellow' — DeVere, you know — and Gil [Robinson] kept telling them he wasn't any place around.

"Why, you big skunks,' they taunted us, 'we'll clean you out. You won't fight.'

Gil Robinson.

"And they tormented my men so that they were on the point of leaving the show where it was if we didn't let them put a stop to the abuse. Gil came to my car.

"'Jack,' he said, 'it's pretty rough down there. I don't believe we can stand it much longer.'

"'Well,' I told him, 'you mustn't have any row down at the cars. Don't have any row, but if you do get into it, take care of yourselves.'

"When Gil got back to where they were loading, some fellow put a pistol to the head of a workman whose name was Jim Robinson. Jim jerked his head away, and the pistol went

off, but the powder only burned his face. The bullet didn't strike him.

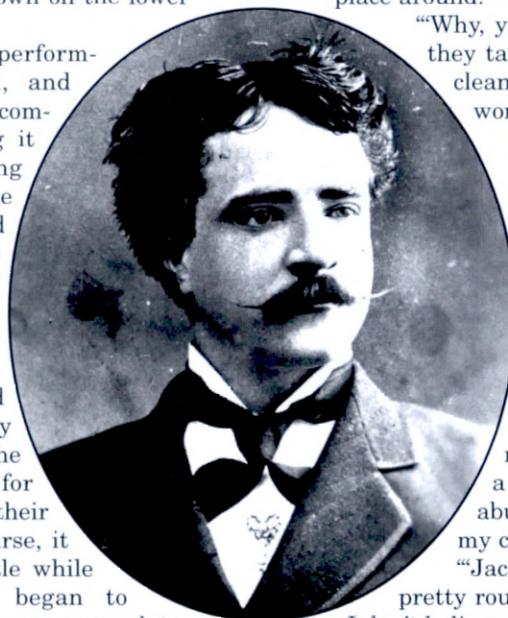
"That started things. Guns commenced to pop, and knives to flash. The smoke from the pistols indicated a pretty good battle was going on. Of course, like all circus rows, it wasn't very many minutes before the rowdies were down and out, and getting the worst of it all around, because in those days we were prepared for a fight at any time. One or two rowdies were badly hurt. In fact, they didn't live long after the fight.

"The railroad ran through the center of the town, down the main street and there were stores on each side. The rowdies made a hasty retreat into one of them, and our fellows followed them. They were so close behind that the rowdies hardly had time to get the door shut and the solid window shutters closed when my men got up on the porch in front of the store. They received a volley out of the windows, but fortunately nobody was killed.

"There happened to be two or three stanchions lying loose and close by the porch. Our fellows got them and battered the door down. When the door fell the mob went out the back way. Our fellows kept after them, and they went right into the next store, through the back door and windows, and through the store into the street, with my men right behind them. They chased the rowdies through nearly all the stores in town, and then came to the corner where I stood. It looked to me that they had done enough, and I called the men off. They started back to loading the train.

"I didn't think there was a soul left around any place, but all at once, when one of my canvasmen was walking along the side of a car somebody ran up behind him and stuck a big knife in his back.

"Well, Gil happened to see the fellow with the knife, and he took a shot at him. He was at the head of our crowd, down near some cotton bales on the platform of the depot, and just as he shot, someone yelled to him to look out, and he turned around. A fellow ran out of a store with a shotgun in his hands, and took aim at Gil. He jumped behind a cage, and just as he did, the gun went off. I suppose a dozen to twenty buckshot went



through the cage, which happened to have a hartebeest in it. It didn't live long after that, and when it died we cut it open. There were six big buck-shot in him.

"We began to load the horses down at the end of the train away from where the first fighting took place, when along came a lot more rowdies. They stood back in the dark, and commenced shooting at my men as they were loading the horses. They hit one of my men, but didn't kill him. But that intimidated my men, so that it was all I could do to keep them at work, and to get the show loaded.

"After a while things got so serious that something had to be done, so one of my assistant bosses went up to the oil wagon, and got three or four buckets of coal oil. He carried them into the square in front of the stores while the mob was shooting at us half a square up the street. The boys yelled to the crowd that if another shot was fired, or he heard anybody make another threat, he was going to saturate the store in front of him, in fact, the whole town, and set fire to it. To make his threat good, he threw the oil on the roof of the store. That settled things there, and a little after dark, we got loaded, and got away, as we thought, without any further trouble to be expected.

"But it only had begun. About a mile-and-a-half out of the town there was a trestle that we had to go over. Some of the rowdies slipped out there and commenced to saw it in two, while a lot of others hid themselves in the bushes along the railroad. They shot into our train as we went along but everybody was well protected, except one canvasman, who let his foot hang over the edge of a wagon. He got his big toe shot off. The fellow who did that must have taken good aim.

"When we got to the trestle it held together while our train went over it, but the next train, which happened to be a freight, was wrecked."

Gil Robinson gave version #2 of the tale in his book *Old Wagon Show Days*. To quote: "It was Saturday, and the town was crowded. Shortly after the parade started, thirty or forty tough citizens gathered around the ticket wagon and began firing their guns in the air. The sheriff was sent

for, and responded with evident reluctance. When we demanded protection for the show, he said, "Taint no use tryin, I jest can't do nothin' with 'em. There was a show down here a couple of years ago, an' the boys busted into the dressing tent an' killed two of the circus fellers an' since that time they've been jest natchally lookin' for gore." The sheriff further remarked that we would save ourselves plenty of trouble and probably escape a few fatalities if we permitted the boys to do as they pleased and didn't do nothin' to rile 'em.

"The word was quickly passed around for the employees to prepare for trouble; loaded rifles and shot-guns were placed in convenient places behind the cages, and a goodly supply of stakes and other implements of offense and defense were planted where they could readily be procured in case of need.

"The doors were opened and the crowd flocked into the tent. There were a few arguments when the bad men of the town and surrounding country tried to push their way through without buying tickets, but these were handled diplomatically. The show started, and we were congratulating ourselves on escaping serious trouble, when an usher came out to the front door and reported that one of the 'bad men' insisted on going into the ring and interfering with the performance. One of the bosses sent in to try and mollify the 'tough citizen' get him to sit down in

the audience. He found the fellow on the ring bank with his feet inside and the performance temporarily stopped.

"My friend" said the circus man quietly, 'you'll be able to see the show better in the seats, and if you will go over there to the reserved seats one of the ushers will take good care of you.' The fellow simply grinned, and one of his friends on the seats yelled: 'Stay there, Jeff, don't let 'em put you out.' Jeff sized up the circus man, dug his heels into the dirt, and growled: 'I reckon I'll stick here.'

The circus man started to walk away, but turned quickly at the warning cry of one of the clowns. The tough had drawn a long, ugly looking knife, and was playfully toying with it. With an agility learned by long experience, the circus boss seized the elbow of the hand holding the knife, and with his other hand grasped the fellow by the back of his neck and hustled him over to the seats and sent him sprawling among his cronies. The gang made a rush for the circus man, and in a minute the tent was a mass of seething, yelling, rioting humanity. The boss canvasman's whistle blew, the sidewalls were dropped down, everyone rushed to get outside, and in a short time the arena was deserted. Then the canvasmen, trained for such an emergency, began to remove the seats and

Gil Robinson inside the John Robinson ticket wagon in 1872.



to lower the canvas peaks.

"Suddenly there was a cry of 'Hey Rube.' Jeff and his fellow desperadoes, joined by the sheriff, had massed themselves between the tents and the railroad, and as the crowd thinned out, advanced for an attack on the show. Out came guns and tent stakes and the gang was received with a volley of buckshot and blows that halted them, and presently sent them scurrying for shelter.

"The ground was covered with the injured.

"Those who escaped barricaded themselves in stores and barns from which they were dragged by the infuriated circus men and severely beaten. The battle finally ceased for lack of enemies.

"We picketed the town for fear of outside reinforcements, and quickly loaded the cars. One of the men, who was a telegraph operator, got in touch with the chief train dispatcher after the station agent had disappeared and he arranged to give us an extra engine and the right of way. Then shortly after everybody boarded the cars, lights were ordered dimmed, and the train pulled out.

"The defeated desperadoes tried to saw through the piles of a bridge about a mile out of town, but were not quick enough to wreck the show train. We passed over safely but a freight train that attempted to cross later on went down with the debris of the wrecked bridge. We did not linger long in Texas."

Dan Dale, the circus treasurer, was quoted in the early 1900's as thinking that the casualties were very high--"twenty-three were killed and more than 50 wounded. The show lost seven killed" plus one more killed in the ambush at the railroad bridge.

We have now heard the showmen's point of view. What did the people of Jacksonville think happened? Accounts in the local press around Jacksonville, and interviews with witnesses (summarized in a local history) agree that many of the spectators crowded too close to the per-



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF JOHN ROBINSON'S GREAT SHOW, THE BIGGEST AND THE BEST IN THE WORLD

formance ring, and disturbed the performing horses, but the audience withdrew when told to do so. One of the circus workers, a very large, strong man, was provoked by the attitude of one of the spectators, and roughly seized the man by the throat and shoulder, and threw him onto the front row of the audience. The townspeople went to the aid of their fellow citizen, and while the atmosphere became tense, the performance continued and finished.

The locals had no consensus about what or who started the shooting, but their stories emphasize the innocents caught up in the street fight, women and children who were trapped in the stores by the crossfire screaming so loudly in their terror that the screams were audible over the gunfire. One storekeeper, Capt. W. H. Lovelady, was said to have stacked bags of coffee beans across the doorway and front of his store, to protect the citizens trapped inside. The townspeople didn't confirm the threat to burn down the town, but details about the fight in town vary greatly. While no individual took credit for planning the railway trestle ambush, the townspeople said twenty-five or thirty men participated, and fired upon the circus train as it sped away.

It's no surprise that the citizens deny the charge of wholesale drunkenness among the crowd: Their view is that the main factor linking the "mob" was community spirit, uniting against outsiders. Their take on casualties was that in the town, "six or seven wounded, including one or two bystanders. None of the wounds was fatal. It was believed by the local residents that the circus men had suffered heavily, with some killed and many wounded."

What really happened that cold, wet November day? We don't know, but some things are clear.

The precipitating event, everyone agrees, is the confrontation between the showman DeVere and the townie "Jeff." The citizens blame the circus men for mishandling their fellow citizen,

in contrast to the Robinsons' versions: whatever really happened there in the ring, it lit the fuse for everything else. It's also clear that both sides were prepared, maybe even eager, for some kind of brawl to occur.

All sides also agree on what is the scariest, strangest part of the whole story for me: twenty-five or thirty citizens were willing to destroy the railway link that drove the town's economy in order to wreck the circus train, and force a final shootout with the showmen.

Finally, everyone agrees that, whatever really happened, Jacksonville acquired such a reputation that no circus would come to Jacksonville for the rest of the century.

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, that's the story. As promised, it was a wild-west story, although from relatively civilized East Texas. It featured a bad man named Jeff, a showman named DeVere, and John and Gil Robinson. It had a gunfight, a hair-breadth escape, riot, assault and the John Robinson Circus. It's a wild, wonderful tale, and much of it is probably even true.

Bibliography:

Chipman, Bert J. *Hey Rube*, Hollywood, CA, Hollywood Print Shop, 1933.

Dallas Herald, April 16, 1870, Page 1, column 5. Cited on www.tomato-capital.com/publications/misc/dallasherald16April1870.asp.

Moore, Jack. *The Great Jacksonville Circus Fight and Other Cherokee County Stories*, Jacksonville, TX, Kiely Printing Co., 1971.

Robinson, Gil. *Old Wagon Show Days*, New York, Brockwell, 1925.

Smith, Greg WWW. Tomat Capital.Com
Sturdevant, C. G., *Old Circus Days In Texas*.
Frontier Times, August 1932, pp. 485-486

Texas State Historical Society, "JACKSONVILLE, TX", *Handbook of Texas Online*. (www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/articles/CC.ncc10.html).

Texas State Historical Society, "CHEROKEE COUNTY," *Handbook of Texas Online*. (www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/articles/CC.ncc10.html).

THOSE RIDING RIEFFENACHS

By John Daniel Draper

One of the most beautiful and graceful equestrian acts ever presented was that of the Mitzirose Troupe, Maria (Mitzi) and Rose Rieffenach. It appeared on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1922 through 1937 and was performed on a platform type pad attached to the back of a single ring horse, directed by the whip of the girls' mother, Maria Enders Rieffenach. The platform insured equilibrium in the daring carrying act on their steed as it circled the ring. Although described in their contracts as a double athletic riding act, due to their skill, wardrobe and artistry it was far more than that.

Just to have seen them walk into the center ring was a privilege, for one would seldom have witnessed such sculptured grace. "Once mounted on their horse, their posing was an act that one could see many times and ask for more." The statuary balancing on their milk white steed was noted not only for its beauty but also for its daring.

Rosie, Jimmy, Mitzi and Betty Rieffenach in 1925. Pfening Archives.

Mitzi would lift Rose up with her right arm and hand, holding her high in a horizontal position while they rode around the ring. In other poses Rose rode either in a horizontal position with her right knee on Mitzi's shoulder or stood upright with her right foot on Mitzi's shoulder and her left foot supported by Mitzi's extended left arm or stood upright on Mitzi's shoulder on her right foot holding her left leg upright. In all these instances Mitzi would be standing erect as the horse encircled the ring.

The riders wore white satin costumes with white tights and white ballet slippers. Two ostrich feathers, one pink and one green, rested on one hip. Flower-covered plaques were worn over each ear. Madame Rieffenach, the matronly ring mistress, wore a white gown.

In the big family bareback act which came later, the pad was not used. Through 1938 this act included Mitzi, Rose and their sister, Bertha (Betty), as well as their brother Simon James Rieffenach and Clarence Charles Bruce, Rose's hus-



Clarence and Vera Bruce in 1925.
Circus World Museum collection.

band. In one pose James and Mitzi rode Roman style on three horses supporting Betty and Rose, standing on their shoulders. In another turn,

The Rieffenach troupe in 1926.
Circus World Museum collection.





Clarence Bruce and Rose Rieffenach on their wedding day.

James would kneel on his hands and knees on the bareback horse as Bruce, the "dude clown," stood on his back pretending to be precariously balanced and ready to topple to the ground at any moment.

Clarence Bruce was the somersaulting star in the big act, topping his offering with a "twisting somersault from horse to horse in column." Then there was more. In his "finish ride" the presentation by Bruce was a sight no one could forget. On a small, fleet horse he did some of the fastest bareback riding ever seen. He rode an entire principal act on one

Rosie and Mitzi on Ringling-Barnum in 1937. Pfening Archives.



foot, simulating an "off-balance stance all the way." The audience truly believed that he was about to fall off at any moment.

After the 1938 season on Al G. Barnes and Sells-Floto, the composition of the act changed. By 1941 Mitzi (Mrs. Carl Jahn) had retired

to operate a lunch room in Sarasota and Freddie and Ethel Freeman and Corinne Dearo had joined the act. One photo of the troupe at that time, when it was on Cole Bros. Circus, also included Lucy Ballet. After the death of Betty Rieffenach Olvera in early 1942, the troupe consisted of Ernestine Clarke, Freddie and Ethel Freeman and Corinne Dearo in addition to Rose Rieffenach, Clarence Bruce, James Rieffenach and Madame Rieffenach. At the end of that season the group had disbanded.

In 1943 James continued on Cole Bros. Circus, which still listed the Rieffenachs in its program. He rode with the Poodles Hanneford family which also included Freddie and Ethel Freeman. The following year found James again on Cole Bros., this time with the Joe Hodgini troupe, made up of Joe and Tommie Hodgini, Fred and Ethel Freeman and Corinne Dearo.

James was booked along with the Giustino Loyal troupe and the Freemans for 1945. However, on April 27th at the age of 39, James died of a heart attack in the dressing room of Cole Bros. at Peoria, Illinois five minutes before the afternoon performance. He was buried in Peoria at St. Mary's Cemetery.

The Rieffenach Riding Act was owned by Maria Enders Rieffenach. Of Hungarian



Clarence Bruce and the three Rieffenach sisters on Ringling-Barnum in 1939. Pfening Archives.

nationality, her parents operated Circus Enders until about 1905 when the family joined the Sarrasini Circus in its tours of Europe. In 1921 the "Geschwister Rieffenach, Akrobatinnen zu Pferde," were on the German Circus Carl Hagenbeck. Booked by John Ringling, the Rieffenachs came to the United States in 1922 to debut in the center ring of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at Madison Square Garden. Appearing with them in the end rings were the Torvelles and the Rooney-Meers riding acts.

The following year, Mitzi and Rose, with a "handful of graceful stunts," shared the riding honors at Madison Square Garden with the Ernestos, two boys specializing in double riding, and with the Sevillos. The latter troupe consisted of four riders who mounted horses singly and doubly. Then the four of them dashed about the ring on one steed. At the finish, one of the boys put a pair of baskets on his feet and rode a galloping horse securely and gracefully.

In 1924 the great May Wirth and company were back on Ringling-

Barnum to be there through 1927.¹ On the same program the Rieffenachs were announced in display #8, center ring, as "champion equestriennes from the Urals² to introduce to America unique feats in the act of riding." Flanking them in the side rings were the Ernestos and the Clarkdons, both great riding troupes. In display #16 were the Jahns, an unusual perch and balancing act. Carl Jahn of this family was to become the husband of Mitzi Rieffenach.

Before opening with Ringling-Barnum in 1925, the Rieffenach sisters had an engagement in vaudeville at Poll's Palace Theater in Springfield, Massachusetts. Also, that spring they appeared at the Ziyara Shrine Circus, directed by Fred Bradna at Utica, New York from March 2 to 7. In addition to their riding acts, the roster included Madame Ella Bradna & Co., Dan Darragh with his baby elephant act, Buck Baker's Funny Ford and Joe Basile's concert band.

In the 1925 Ringling-Barnum program for Madison Square Garden in display #6 it was pointed out that while sister acts were numerous in other lines of entertainment, for the Rieffenachs it was pure novelty and cleverness as they appeared all in white with red roses. "What they do on horseback in the nature of athletic stunts would do credit to anyone on a solid stage." Nevertheless, they were in a side ring. Ella Bradna who "puts a spectacle down to a science with a complete aviary of pretty girls, noble horses, birds of the air and her pride, pet canines," had center ring. In the other side ring were the Edithos, agile and able horsemen with a "smooth style in mounting and riding astride two horses, in a niche far above the average."

It was not all work on the show in those days. There was time for recreation, also. The women organized two baseball teams. May Wirth headed one team. The other team included Vera Bruce (1st base), Dorothy Siegrist (2nd base), Rose Rieffenach (3rd base), Katherine Hanneford (rightfield), Betty Rieffenach (centerfield) and Mitzi Rieffenach (leftfield). In Chicago the diamond was laid out just beyond the dressing rooms and



This Ringling-Barnum lithograph was used in 1930. Pfening Archives.

most of the 1600 personnel turned out to watch, either sitting on chairs or on the ground.

The 1925 road program had the following listings: Display #5 R-1. The Fords, athletes on horseback, champion equestriennes from the Ural Mountains.³ R-2 Madame Bradna & Co. R-3 Europe's most beautiful and accomplished equestriennes, the Mitzis⁴ Display #8 Thirteen high school riders including among others Betty Rieffenach, Harry Herzog, Jorgen Christiansen, Frank Miller, Florence Mardo, Mabel Stark, and Master Paul Nelson. Display #10 R-1 Rieffenachs, beautiful "Old World Act." R-2 May Wirth & Co. R-3 Charless Bros., athletes on horseback. Display #15 R-1 Ernestos, including "Humpty Dumpty" clown in whirlwind riding. R-2 The Wirths with "Phil the Marvel." R-3 George Hanneford Family.

In speaking with the press in Greenville, Mississippi that fall, Rose modestly "confessed that Mitzi is the better rider."

The Rieffenachs appeared at the New York Hippodrome early in 1926, being held over for a second week. A fine hand was given "for the capital equestrian offering in which the carrying work was quite the most excellent ever seen there," stated one critic.

Prior to 1926 no mention is found concerning the presence of Clarence Bruce with the Rieffenach Troupe. Clarence Charles Bruce was the

great Australian bareback somersault rider and comedian. He was born in Hong Kong on February 13, 1901. A sister, Vera Bruce, was born in Singapore on February 19, 1905. Both of them eventually became naturalized American citizens. Having learned to ride at the age of eight, he toured the Orient with his family from 1909 until 1922 on Harmston's Circus. He joined Wirth's Circus in Australia in 1923 and in 1924 came to the United States and worked with May Wirth on Ringling-Barnum. Early in 1925 it was reported that both Clarence and Vera were doing well with May Wirth's riding act. Annie Bruce, their mother, visited them in America. In Australia, Annie had been commissioned to buy dogs, horses and kangaroos which she shipped to Harmston's Circus in India.

Exactly when Bruce joined the Rieffenach act is not clear, but it was apparently in either very late 1925 or in 1926. Rose Rieffenach and Clarence Bruce, both bareback riders with Ringling-Barnum, were married on October 20, 1926 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in New Orleans by the Rev. Albert Biever, S. J., pastor. The maid of honor was Dorothy Siegrist, an aerialist, and the bridesmaids were Rose's sisters, Mitzi and Betty, who shared her act. Phil St. Leon

Wirth was the best man. The wedding was attended only by the intimate friends of the bride and the groom.

Now part of the family, Clarence Bruce introduced comedy into the Rieffenach act. In this role he demonstrated that he was one of the best bareback riders in the world. Also, he was very congenial and a good friend to everybody. His initial wardrobe as a clown was not the very familiar "dude" outfit he employed later. Rather, it was made up of a garish checkered suit with knickers, checkered golf hose, huge horn rim spectacles and a wig that gave him a tremendously exaggerated forehead and receding hairline.

During this season a lithograph honoring Rose Rieffenach was used by Ringling-Barnum.

In 1926 Vera Bruce was an aerialist on Ringling-Barnum. Besides being a pinwheel trapeze artist, she was also in the May Wirth act. In November she joined the James Dutton troupe and scored well with it at the Jennings, Louisiana Fair.

The Miami Police Circus in January of 1927 featured Dutton's Comedy Riding Surprise, a bareback act, which introduced Vera Bruce. That season on Ringling-Barnum the Mitzis from the Ural Mountains were billed as "pulchritudinous performers on horseback who had mastered unique feats in riding and must be seen to be appreciated."

In January of 1928 some Ringling-Barnum acts were at the South Florida Fair including the Rieffenach sisters, Minnie Thompson with her high school horse and the Riding Mitzis consisting of five people including Clarence Bruce, the riding clown. The next month the Rieffenach sisters, together with Theol Nelson, appeared at the Tampa, Florida Fair.

Neither May Wirth nor Jorgen Christiansen were on Ringling-Barnum in 1928 but the Rieffenachs and the Ernestos were retained. That year the sea elephant, Goliath, was featured. Betty Rieffenach rode a high jumping horse.

The Rieffenachs performed their bareback riding act in silver and green brocade, suggesting the cut of a fitted riding coat. Short sleeves of the brocade terminated at the elbow, where they were bordered with white marabou, supplemental sleeves of green chiffon, bell formation, flaring from elbow to wrist and bordered with the marabou. White tights and shortened versions of Russian boots in white kid with green kid cuffs and rhinestone Russian-shaped tiaras were also worn.⁵

In 1928 Vera Bruce was an equestrian with Ringling-Barnum and also performed her aerial act. She continued with her aerial work on the show in 1929. In August of that year she began a winter tour with Circo Codona in Mexico. She did looping and foot juggling and, with Alfred and Lalo, she was a member of the Codona trio. This troupe repeated the type of casting they had done on Ringling-Barnum. Les Pierrantoni, a Spanish riding act, was also on Circo Codona as was Lillian Leitzel.

In 1929 Dennis Curtis booked the Minneapolis Zurah Shrine for the week of January 21 and the St. Paul

Rosie with Mitzie on top. Circus World Museum collection.



Osman Shrine the next week. The acts included the Rieffenachs, Ella Bradna, Curtis' taximeter mule, Pete Mardo and John Robinson's elephants. On the Syracuse, New York, Tigris Shrine Circus for 1929 appeared the Rieffenach sisters, athletes on horseback in Display #2; the two Jahns, hand and head equilibrists in Display #7; and the Rieffenach family, world's greatest bareback riders, in Display #14.

On Ringling-Barnum that year the Lloyds, the Riefferiachs and the Ernestos provided the riding acts. Clarence Bruce added comedy to the offerings of the Rieffenachs. In addition there were the Cyrillo Bros., the Orrin Troupe of three women and two men and the Mitzirose sisters. The latter presented a pretty pad riding exhibition enhanced by tasteful costuming and innate grace. In the last week of April, Mitzi scalded her right foot, but never missed a performance. The Rieffenachs were booked on the Detroit Shrine Show for the middle of October in 1929. At this time back in Australia, Annie Bruce was taking things easy at Lilydale Estates, Corowa, N. S. W.

In 1930 John Robinson's four weeks of Shrine dates included Minneapolis, St. Paul, Cincinnati and Louisville and featured both the Rieffenach sisters' statutory act and the Rieffenach family riding act. The latter included both somersault riding and comedy by the "dude" clown, Clarence Bruce. The Rieffenach sisters also appeared on the Orrin Davenport Detroit Shrine date in February with ringmaster Fred Bradna, Clyde Beatty with his 40 lions and tigers, and Cheerful Gardner with five Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants.

The Rieffenach contract with Ringling-Barnum for 1930 contained the following: The company was to be composed of Mariana, Bertha, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Bruce and Simon (James) Rieffenach. Two sisters to perform a first class, double athletic riding act of the same quality as presented for the employers

during the seasons of 1928 and 1929. A combination comedy and jockey riding act by the entire company. To supply new costumes and particularly good comedy makeup for Mr. Bruce.

One lady was to ride in manege act. The circus provided three state-rooms on the train. The salary was \$450 per week, about \$4,850 in today's dollars..

The 1930 Ringling-Barnum road performance presented: Display #5 R-1 Orrin troupe in daring and unique horsemanship. R-2 Mitzirose sisters, exquisitely beautiful. R-3 Cyrillo brothers, a pair of jockey riders on double flying mounts. Display #6 Six aerial artists with the aerial queen, Leitzel, in center ring. One of the six aerial artists was Vera Bruce in a unique performance high aloft. Display #14 Olveras brothers, center ring in aerial balancing. Display #16 R-1 Ernesto troupe. R-2 Rieffenach troupe with comedy riding by Clarence Bruce. R-3 Orrin Davenport troupe.

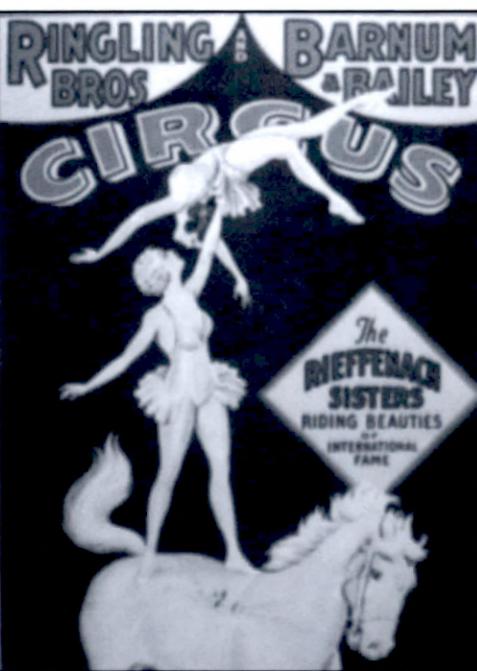
In the fall of 1930 the Rieffenachs with four women performers and two men were on Santos and Artigas in Cuba.

Vera Bruce continued with the Codona Troupe in 1930. Her mother, now Mrs. Gale, shipped a number of Australian horses to Harmston's Circus in Java where it had an extraordinary run of success. She also considered sending over certain local acts to Java and its environs.

Early in 1931 Lillian Leitzel, Alfredo Codona's wife, was performing her one arm phlange act high in the Valencia Music Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark when a brass swivel on her rigging snapped and, with no net, she fell in a fatal accident.⁶

The Rieffenachs, displaying their usual class with the "dude" clown, still held the center ring on Ringling-Barnum in 1931. They were flanked in rings one and three by the Ernestos with their dwarf rider and by the Reinsch brothers.

The Reiffenach troupe, early in 1932 for the first time in England, appeared at Bertram Mills' Olympia London Circus. Returning to the U. S. for the Ringling-Barnum season, in



Another Ringling-Barnum litho featuring the Rieffenach sisters. Pfening Archives.

Display #7 the Mitziroses in the center ring shared honors with the Loyal sisters, new in America, and with the Orrin troupe. In Display #20 the riding acts were the Orrin Davenports, the Rieffenachs and the Loyal Repenskis.

On September 18, 1932 Vera Bruce and Alfredo Codona were married. Annie Bruce Gale, early in the season of 1933, again visited Vera and Clarence on Ringling-Barnum in New York City where Vera was performing as an aerialist. The Mitzirose Sisters and the Bettinas were billed in R-1 and R-2 in display #6. Three girls in the Orrin Davenport act, using the name Orrin Sisters, were in R-3. Frank Rieffenach⁷ paced R-1. Madame Rieffenach paced R-2 and Orrin Davenport paced R-3. The riding families in display #19 were the Rieffenachs, augmented by James and the "dude" clown, the Orrin Davenports and the Walters troupe, which was the Walter Guice family.

The following season there were two Ringling-Barnum lithographs illustrating the Rieffenach acts. One was dedicated to the sisters, "beauties of international fame," and the other to Rose, "Hungarian Queen of Bareback Equestrianism." In the rid-

ing acts, the Rieffenach feminine duo graced the center ring and the Guices and more Rieffenachs were in the outside rings. Alfredo and Vera were with the flying Codona trio. Vera also appeared with Joe E. Brown in a comical 1934 circus movie.

In March of 1935 the Rieffenachs and Clarence were on the American Legion's 6th Annual Society Circus in Sarasota, Florida. A contract with Ringling-Barnum had been signed by the Rieffenachs for the 1935 season with the following provisions: "THE RIEFFENACH FAMILY (Mariana, Bertha, Rose, Jimmy (Simon) Rieffenach and Clarence Bruce) to present: First class double athletic riding act by Rose and Mitzi. Double riding act by Bertha and Jimmy or single act by Clarence Bruce. A combination comedy and jockey riding act by the three Rieffenach Sisters, their brother and Clarence Bruce. All acts to be of the same standard as former seasons. One lady to ride manege if required. Show to supply 3 state-rooms. A charge of five dollars weekly will be made by the show for each dog or pet carried. No compulsory tipping is permitted in this organization, and if any employee, on account of not receiving tips, in any way neglects his duty it is up to you to report such cases to the management. The salary will be \$450 per week [about \$6,200 today]."

Features of the 1935 program were: Display #2 Famous riding stars: R-1 Peerless riders, the Loyal sisters. R-2 Two beautiful and talented riders from the Ural Mountains, the Mitizirose Sisters. R-3 The European duo of horsemanship, the Bettinas. Display #15 Convulsing mishaps of finest riding comedians. R-1 Walters Troupe, novel and unequalled. R-2 Loyal-Repenskis, equals do not exist, R-3 Rieffenach troupe, merry act, sensational, alternates with comedy acts.

In 1935 Alfred Codona became equestrian director of the Ringling-owned Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. He had injured his arm and shoulder so seriously that he could no longer participate in the Codona flying act. Vera Codona also came over to Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus where

she did her daring and sensational single trapeze act in addition to performing in the aerial ballet.

In 1936 the Reiffenach act on Ringling-Bamurn included Vera Codona. At least for the Soldiers' Field date in Chicago, Myrtle Compton was also in the troupe. Luther Davis was the groom. The total company received four hundred fifty dollars per week.

In quarters that spring of 1936, "in the practice barn it was exhilarating to find the world's greatest bareback rider, in sweater and shorts, falling on and off a horse like a Chillicothe farm hand. It makes the whole world akin to discover that such a person is subject to a touch of sciatica and can have trouble limbering up after a winter's rest. That is Clarence Bruce, married into one of the few generation to generation families left in the ring. Traditional bareback riding is not picked up overnight. You must begin in babyhood tumbling for life, wire walking for balance, dancing for style and control. At 6 you should be on a horse. There aren't any more great riders being developed in America."⁸

The 1936 and 1937 programs on the big show featured the same trio of riding troupes as those listed in 1935. Their presentations are characterized as "grace and beauty of equestrianism contrasted amusingly with convulsing mishaps of the world's funniest riding comedians, skilled riders executing the most novel and unequalled feats of horsemanship."

It is interesting to note some of the individual salaries in 1937. Clarence received \$80 per week (about \$1,050 today) for a total of \$2,650 (about \$35,000 today) for 185 days of performance. Vera Codona, who was with the troupe for only 27 days, received \$20 (about \$260 today) per week for total earnings of \$92. Madame Rieffenach earned \$105 (about \$1400 today) per week for a season total of \$3,425 (about \$45,500 today). James Rieffenach at \$40 per



Mama, Clarence, Ethel Freeman, Corinna Dearo, Betty, Rose, James and Freddy Freeman on Cole Bros. Circus in 1941. Circus World Museum collection.

week received a total of \$1,420. The groom, Luther Davis, a married man, earned \$5 (about a pitiful \$66 today) per week.

On July 1, 1937 Vera Codona and Alfredo were divorced and on July 31 she was murdered in Long Beach, California by her former husband in a very tragic murder-suicide. She was only 32 years old, being born on February 19, 1905.⁹

In 1938 after completing seventeen seasons on Ringling-Barnum, the Rieffenachs went to the Ringling-owned Al G. Barnes & Sells Floto Circus. The Cristiani riding family came to Ringling-Barnum that year and performed with the Loyal Repenski troupe and the Walters troupe. The equestrian program on Al G. Barnes & Sells Floto featured: Display #11: R-1 Betty Rieffenach, principal rider with graceful skill. R-2 Mitzirose Sisters, in acrobatic postures. R-3 Mons. James Rieffenach, principal rider with exceptional skill. Display #16: Gaited horses, perhaps some of the last ever seen on an American circus: Rhea Jack, Betty Rieffenach, Alma Taylor, Dianne White, Shirley Byron. Display #19: Highest class riding act, world famous Rieffenachs featuring Clarence Bruce, impersonating a

drunk on a bareback horse.

After the teamsters' strike that closed the Ringling show in Scranton, Pennsylvania in mid-season 1938,¹⁰ some of its acts were sent to the Barnes show which now used the title Al G. Barnes & Sells-Floto Combined Circus Presenting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Stupendous New Features. In this combined show, the riding acts were: Display #8 R-1 Mitzirose sisters. R-2 Cristiani Troupe. R-3 Bettina (Betty Rieffenach) and James. Display #16 R-1 Miss Machaqua (Cristiani),

skillful bareback riding. R-2 World famous Rieffenach family with Clarence Bruce. R-3 Miss Cossette (Cristiani), principal act with exceptional skill and grace.

In 1939 the Rieffenachs were involved mainly with spot dates and fairs. The Loyal-Repenski troupe and the Water Guice comedy riders went over to the Cole Bros. Circus as Ringling released some of its long-term riding acts.

Shrine shows claimed the attention of the Rieffenachs for at least a portion of 1940. Together with the Davenport riders they were on both the Cleveland and Chicago Shrine Circuses. That year when Clarence Bruce got all the news from Austin King, just back from Australia, it made both him and the Freemans homesick since they had been there for so many pleasant years with the Wirth Circus.

The Rieffenachs were with Cole Bros. Circus in 1941. Mitzi had retired in Sarasota, Florida. As mentioned earlier, the troupe now consisted of Freddie and Ethel Freeman, Corinne Dearo, and possibly Lucy Ballet, in addition to Rose and Betty Rieffenach, James Rieffenach, Madarnae Rieffenach and Clarence Bruce. On the opening night of the stand at Louisville, Kentucky, James fell and sustained injuries that required nine stitches in his forearm. He was out of the act for three days.

One of the highlights of the 1941

Cole Bros. program was: display #10: Equestrianism incomparable, famous riding stars in enthralling and novel displays, beautiful bareback riding ballerinas: R-1 Lola Rieffenach,¹¹ R-2 Miss Lucy (Ballet); R-3 Miss Anita LaBell.

In a tragic accident in January 1942 Betty Rieffenach Olvera was so severely burned when a stove exploded in her trailer that she died on April 17. An unconfirmed report was that she had been cleaning a costume with gasoline. She lived for 12 weeks in a Louisville, Kentucky hospital with little or no hope for recovery before she finally expired. Among the immediate survivors were her husband, Carlos, and her 8 year old daughter, Rosie.¹² The Rieffenach family continued on Cole Bros. in 1942.

At the end of the 1942 season, the Rieffenach Troupe as such was permanently dissolved.

The next year James Rieffenach continued on Cole Bros. He rode with the big Poodles Hanneford Family act and also in display #9, R-1 in a carrying act with Ethel Freeman. Freddie Freeman and Corinne Dearo rode in a similar act in R-3 while Poodles' daughter, Gracie, rode a principal act in center ring.

In August of 1943 James Rieffenach left the show for induction into the U. S. Army. However, he soon returned, being rejected because of high blood pressure. By September the Hanneford act was almost decimated by a number of injuries. James Rieffenach had taken a nasty fall in Seattle and was out for a few days as was Poodles' wife, Grace. Poodles, himself was just returning after having been out with three broken ribs.

In the Cole Bros. program for 1944 in display #7, the graceful bareback stars were listed as: R-1 Rieffenachs; R-2 Hodginis; R-3 Freemans.

The "Rieffenachs" reference could refer only to James Rieffenach, possibly in a principal act. In Display #19 were the bareback riders of the Joe Hodgini Family which also included James Rieffenach.

The bareback acts for Cole Bros. in 1945 were: R-1 Freemans; R-2



The Riding Rieffenachs on Cole Bros. Circus in 1942. Pfening Archives.

Gustins (Giustino Loyal troupe, somersaulting bareback riding champions); R-3 Rieffenachs (this was only James in a possible principal act).

Simon James Rieffenach had barely started the season when he died of a heart attack on the Cole Bros. lot in Peoria, Illinois on April 23, 1945. He was 38 years old, having been born June 8, 1906. At the time Freddie Freeman remarked: "The entire show was shocked beyond words at the sudden death of Jimmie Rieffenach. Jimmie and I were talking minutes before he died. Grand boy. Ethel and I had ridden with him on and off for 22 years, both on this circus and on Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey."

Clarence Bruce (February 13, 1901-June 1, 1954) died after an illness of six months. He was survived by his widow, Rose Rieffenach, and was buried in Chicago.

Maria Enders Rieffenach (January 1, 1879-March 2, 1956) died in Chicago. She was survived by her two daughters, Mrs. Maria Jahn (Mitzi) and Mrs. Rose Bruce and a sister, Mrs. Paula Belaci. Mrs. Belaci was a member of the Five Belacis who had played in vaudeville.

In 1970 Mitzi and Rose Rieffenach

were honored by induction into the Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida. In the award citation it was stated that the sisters had learned to ride with the family troupe at the age of five while on their grandparents' Enders Circus in Hungary. Their stellar accomplishment was riding two high. Mitzi stood on the back of a cantering horse with Rose as the top mounter. Mitzi performed a one arm lift of her sister and Rose then did a difficult thigh stand. They did other bareback acts and routines with their mother, brother and sister. They performed in the United States from 1922 through 1942 until the act was finally dissolved.¹³

Notes

1. May Wirth was with Ringling Bros. in 1917 and 1918; on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1919 and 1920; on Walter L. Main in 1921 and 1923. She played a series of spot dates and fairs in 1922.

2. In the manner of flamboyant and romanticized circus advertising, the family was often described as coming from the Ural Mountains.

3. Most probably the Rieffenachs other than Mitzi and Rose. They would have been Betty and James Rieffenach.

4. These were Rose and Mitzi Rieffenach, also at times referred to as the Mitzirose Sisters.

5. *Billboard*, April 21, 1928.

6. *Railroad Magazine*, April 1956, p. 18

7. Identity not known.

8. *Banner Line*, March 1, 1953, p. 3

9. *Billboard*, August 7, 1937, p.32; *Ibid.*, August 14, 1937, p. 72

10. *Billboard*, July 2, 1938, p.1 "Ringling-Barnum goes back to quarters when majority of personnel refuse 25% pay cut after striking on June 22d at Scranton, Pennsylvania."

11. Identity not known.

12. *Newspress of Los Angeles*, California, November 1, 1942.

13. *Banner Line*, October 1, 1970, p. 9.



These first two photos show the Sells-Floto big top in 1913. The first is right after the elephants went on a rampage in Winnipeg on July 20. Note the banner on the right. The other picture shows the same tent in a calmer moment. It was 160' across with five 50' middles. The black things hanging above the rings were the shrouds for the statuary acts. They were raised and lowered to reveal each tableau. The seats on the round end were the conventional "blues" or "chicken roosts," but rather than use a grandstand they used "starbacks" which as you can see were nothing more than pieces of wood bolted to the seat plank that when folded up formed a back rest. You can clearly see the starback chairs in the elephant stampede image.

In my youth I was a candy butcher and helped load starbacks. They were pretty heavy, clumsy to load, and the source of many a blood blister, but I'm sure the extra revenue generated offset the inconvenience.

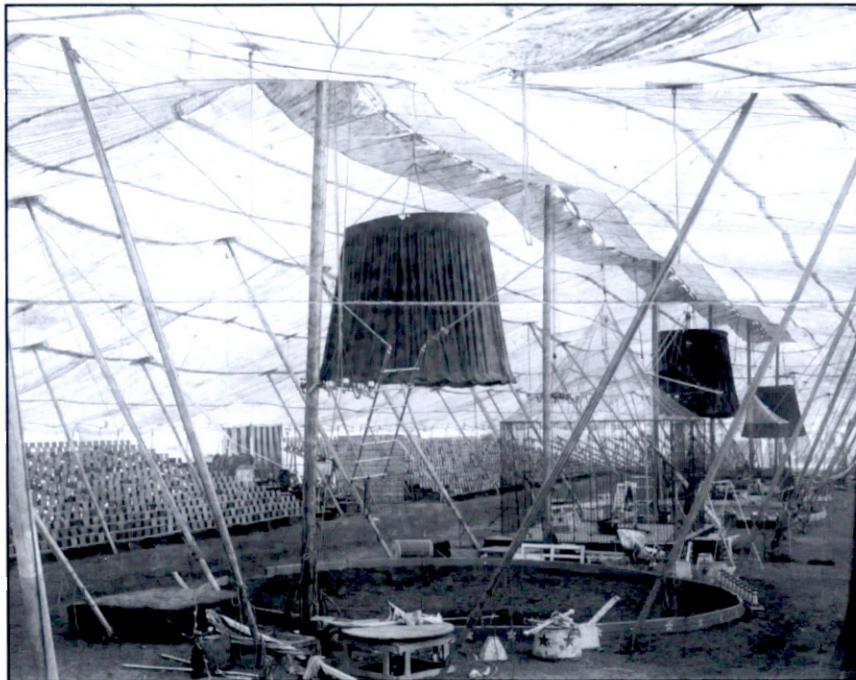
I saw the Dailey show in 1948 and was surprised to see that they didn't have any starback chicken roosts, even in the reserved section. When my parents and I joined Kelly-Miller in 1950, it was the same thing. I was a candy butcher on that show too, and faced the wrath of many an irate customer who, having purchased a reserved seat ticket and even a "seat check" from either Jimmy Hamiter or Ira Watts, was shown to a plank that they had to squeeze through people to get to. They weren't interested in buying a bag of peanuts from me. People who confronted management always got the same answer: "The reserved seats are made of soft pine."

The Millers, owners of the show, always took great pride in pointing out that they never carried grifters, but we were on several grift shows that never generated the heat that



those seat checks did. They affected every man, woman and child who came to the show, whereas the grifters only worked to the sporting element. Consisting of three people, a dealer, an inside man and an outside man, the game of choice was usually "tossing broads," three card monte.

When the day's final performance ended, the exiting crowd was confronted with an appeal from the side show manager explaining that men 18 and older would have the opportunity to see the cooch broads who would leave nothing to the imagination. He would say "Gentlemen,





you will smell the smoke and see the flame." At this cue, the "Lucky Boys" would go to work. On occasion I saw these events culminate with considerable violence, but the family people were home in bed by this time and for that matter most of the show was off the lot.

The next shot is of Everett James, the bandleader with the Mighty Haag Shows, about 1918. His wife Maybelle, to his right, was an aerialist on Haag. The infant is Harry James who became a noted musician and band leader as well as the husband of movie star Betty Grable. Harry's middle name was Haag, being named after Ernest Haag, the

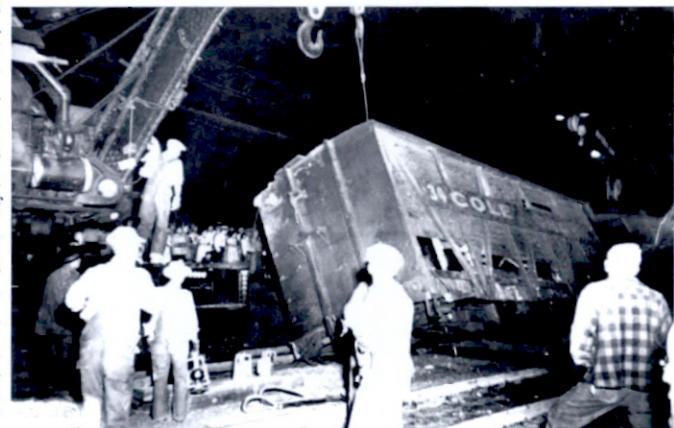
Bros. Circus was pulling into Red-buff, California on a Sunday run. The train stopped right in the center of town. I remember it was a wide thoroughfare with trackage right down the center. My mother and I stepped off the train right in front of a restaurant and movie.

show's owner. He became a child contortionist about 1920, and later played in the Christy Bros. band which his father directed in the 1920s. Note the Haag show pennant on the car.

Late one afternoon in 1946 the Cole

riding on the top of the car when it went over. Ted Meyer broke a leg, the only casualty. There were 13 elephants, and Arky Scott's horse "Circus" in the car. They all made it out ok. There was a foot bridge going over the tracks almost directly over the car, and it was packed with people. Knowing how many elephants were in the car, the crowd would count and cheer as each elephant came out. My mother and I arrived in time to hear the final cheer.

My dad told me that they had used system baggage cars until the bull



car was repaired and the first night they struggled almost until daylight getting the elephants loading in the unfamiliar car.

These pictures of the derailment show the over-turned flat with the cage cars and the elephant car.

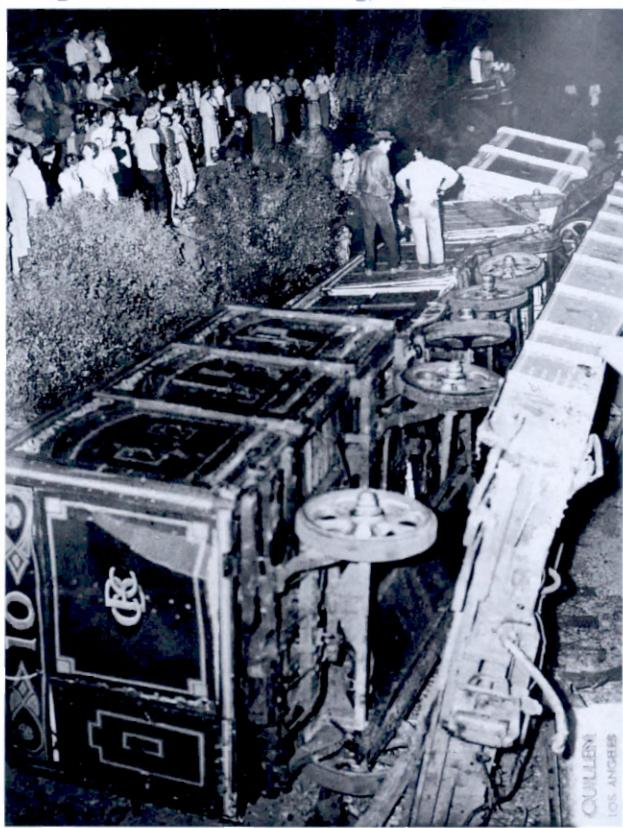
During the movie we heard an ambulance pass outside, but thought nothing of it. When we finally came outside we were shocked to see a huge crowd a short distance down the tracks. We asked what happened and were told that the elephant car had been tipped over.

The train had been broken down into several sections and while spotting them they managed to run two sections on to the same track. The bull car slowly fell on its left side and a flat car with animal cages it its right, side by side.

A number of elephant hands were

I like busy pictures like this next one because every time I look at it I see something new. At first glance I thought the tent was the menagerie, but on closer inspection you can see the top of the stringers pushing against the side wall. So this photo pretty well encompasses the entire LaMont Bros. Circus in 1904. The people in the carriage must be the LaMonts. The band wagon has a nice six horse hitch. There's a half dozen good-sized wagons, including the ticket wagon at right, a clown on a mule, another in a chariot and a monkey on a pony. They didn't leave much behind when they put on their parade.

All in all, this is rather impressive when you consider that the tent looks about like a 60 footer with a 30' middle piece. It could hardly seat much over 300 patrons. My favorite part of this picture, however, is the





lady sitting on the kitchen chair atop the office wagon. With the condition of the roads in those days, the parade could turn into a thrill ride in a hurry.

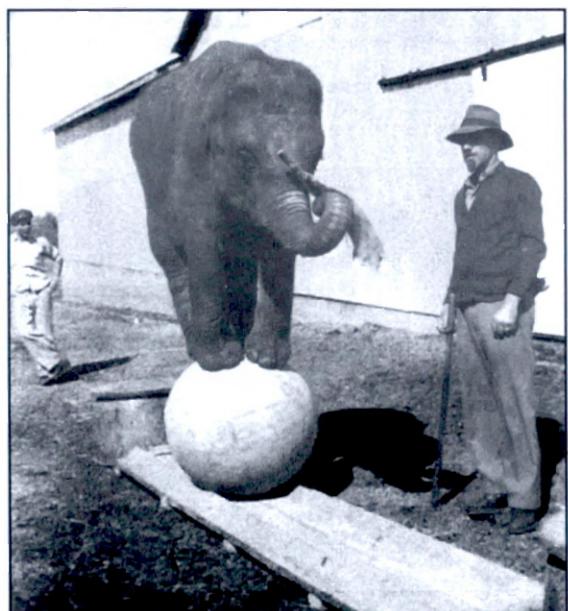
The last picture is of my dad training Anna May to roll a globe in Hugo, Oklahoma during the winter of 1949-1950. Smokey Jones is in the background at left. This is a comparatively easy trick for a small elephant. They are more nimble than you might think. The problem is that as they grow bigger there is less surface for their feet.

Not long after this picture was taken, this globe fell apart and D. R.

Miller went to the Wayne Sanguin machine shop and asked to have a metal globe built. Wayne went to the County Surveyor's office and they came up with a pattern that when cut out in metal resembled eight identical oblong pieces that when bent and fitted together formed a perfect globe. It was something like the rind on an orange.

This is a subject with which I am quite familiar because when my

dad got Anna May for his own act the ball and track came with her and after I joined the operation as truck driver, I estimate that I rolled that globe and drug that track about 10,000 miles up and down steps in small buildings, through the mud a pumpkin fairs, and across the parking lot of many a shopping center.



Circus in Australia: index of Australian Show Movements, 1833-1960

Compiled by Mark St Leon, MA (Hons) CHS 3022

The index lists nearly 10,000 show dates, by date, location and name of show. The index embraces all kinds of itinerant shows (circus, minstrels, vaudeville, musical, operatic, wild West, carnival, menagerie, waxworks etc). The Index includes a searchable CID Rom. The edition is limited 200 copies.

About 60% of entries are specifically circus, and include details of the itineraries of the large American circuses that came here including Cooper, Bailey & Co, W.W. Cole and Sells Bros. About 20% of all entries are specifically American because of the large number of shows of all types that visited here from the USA.

This is a valuable reference work for libraries, collectors and circus historians. The edition is limited 200 copies.

Projected publication date: September 2005

For further details and to reserve your copy, please contact or write as follows:

**Mark St Leon
15 / 479 Forest Road
Penshurst NSW 2222
Australia**

Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART FORTY THREE

By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the dates the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Daily Gazette.

This first installment was inadvertently omitted from the July-August 2005 issue.

August 10, 1918

To one who has been in the business, the arrival and the work of unloading and putting up the big show this season is of more than ordinary interest. On account of the shortage of help, everyone around the show is now doing work of all kinds. The manager, the equestrian director and all performers are expected to be on the job as soon as the show arrives in town. Many of these people are wearing overalls to work in for the first time in many years. In many towns, it is only possible to get the show up in time to give two performances and impossible in many cases to give a parade. In Rockford with the great Ringling show, Fred Worrell, manager, John Agee, equestrian director, Joe Miller, manager of properties and many other heads of departments were among the hardest workers on the job, and although they could not give a parade, they corralled the cages and put up sidewalls around and erected the main entrance. It was then that all hands turned to the big top where the performance was to be given, and at just 2:30, it was possible for them to open the doors. At 3:15 John Agee, equestrian director, blew his whistle for the first time and the great show was on. The one great drawback of that week was the long hauls from where the show was unloaded on the railroad to the show grounds. In Milwaukee on Monday,

Madison, Tuesday, Rockford, Wednesday, all these were from three to four miles from where the shows were obliged to unload. As all the big heavy teams had to make two trips, it made from 14 to 16 miles that each of these teams had to travel. While with these big shows there were many old-timers who had been in the business for years and are always loyal to the close of the season. Yet what is known as the "Floaters" with the show who worked hard in the hot sun, this class of working people were short lived. When it comes to hustling and getting up the big show, one old-timer is worth more than three green ones, because they are ever so willing. All of the big shows are experiencing the same trouble, late into town and late getting out. The Ringling show from Rockford to Clinton Iowa, while this not an extra long run. The show runs in four sections and daylight had commenced to show before the last section pulled out of Rockford. As this section carried most of the sleepers and as they lay in the railroad yards nearly all night, many of the people could get but little sleep on account of the terrible heat. Under these conditions it

is not strange that people known in the business as "tenderfeet" only last a few days. The service flag of the Ringling show which bears 340 stars shows that this number have either enlisted or been drafted since we entered the war.

George Donahue, an acrobatic clown and one of the victims of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus wreck, is near death at St. Margaret's Hospital, following an operation which disclosed the spinal cord to be so badly injured that recovery is thought impossible. Donahue is the plaintiff in a \$100,000 damage suit filed against the Michigan Central Railroad for personal injuries received in the wreck.

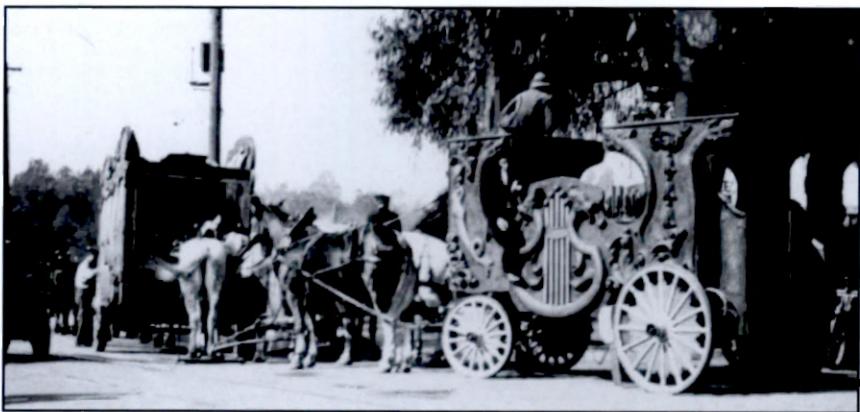
All juvenile hearts and heaps of grown-up hearts were hitting on all six cylinders yesterday. The day had no special significance in the almanac, but it was a red letter occasion for all those endowed with the spirit of eternal youth.

It will be Circus Day!

The big Al G. Barnes street parade in the morning whetted appetites for the Friday matinee. Old and young with mouths agape viewed with wonder the wild animals of the menagerie, the trained elephants and seals. Performances at 2 and 8 p.m. Friday.

A short time ago the Showmen's League of America opened a subscription list to raise money for a monument to be placed in the Showmen's League burial grounds at Woodlawn Cemetery in Chicago. This monument will have a base of something like 20 feet square and 30

The Al G. Barnes Circus steam caliope in parade. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



feet in height and on the top there will be an image of an elephant. The monument will be placed near the grave of the late president of the league, John B. Warren, and many others who lost their lives in the wreck of the Hagenbeck-Wallace show a few weeks ago. The monument will cost somewhere between \$25,000 and \$30,000 and the way the different shows and show people are contributing to this fund, it will not be long until the entire amount will be raised. This only goes to show how the showmen all over the country have shown their loyalty to the cause.

December 21, 1918

For something like forty years Havana, Cuba has been one great place for the winter circus which usually lasts about five months. Some 35 or so years ago it was the Orrin brothers who were great circus performers at that time, both of whom I knew well, but like the great showmen of this country, they have passed away and made room for others. The surviving letter from Havana tells of the great hit which was made by the world's greatest bareback rider, "May Wirth," who for the past two years has been one of the greatest features and drawing cards of the Ringling Brothers in this country.

Antony Artigas boomed and featured May Wirth extensively and she was given a wonderful reception on her first appearance in Havana. She was allotted the distinction of closing the first part and brought down the house with her marvelous riding, the patrons standing on their seats in order not to miss a single gesture or part.

The press of Havana gave the act wonderful notices, making special attention of May Wirth in the evening paper, *La Prensa*, stating that it was right to call her the Queen of the Ring as she was far greater than the very few artists have been according the reception that was given to May Wirth. The program on the opening night ran like clockwork due to the hard work of Mr. Stephanie, the equestrian director.

As I have mentioned before, it was in the middle '80's when I went from

Philadelphia to New York to bring something over forty Europeans--performers who had landed there some few weeks before time for the great Forepaugh show in Philadelphia. Among those people were the great Siegrists and Silbons who are still in business and the coming season are one of the big features with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum Bailey Shows Combined.

Toto Siegrist and Eddie Silbon have always been close friends of mine and while Toto Siegrist is nearing sixty years of age and while Eddie Silbon is now above 50, they are still doing the greatest aerial act of anyone in the business and thousands of people have watched them turn their double somersaults while in the air from one end of the canvas to the other. The following letter tells of their plans for the coming season: "Toto Siegrist is a busy man these days. In addition to looking after his interests of the big Siegrist-Silbon aerial act which has been re-engaged by the combined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey shows, Toto is building a carnival show which will take to the road early in the spring. Many rides and shows are being engaged."

As soon as it became known that the circus veteran was contemplating

Edwin "Poodles" Hanneford.



launching out into the fair business, he was inundated with applications for space with his caravan. Siegrist is of the opinion that next season will be the best ever to be experienced by the outdoor showmen and he intends to have one of the very best and cleanest shows that ever went on the road.

At a meeting of the Showmen's League of America held recently in New York, it was decided after a thorough discussion that the annual event for next year would consist of a banquet and ball to follow the annual election of officers in February. The League has established an enviable reputation for this annual event and the majority of the members who were here attending the fair secretaries' meeting felt that we should fittingly celebrate the winning of the war by holding this event and making it bigger and grander than ever if that were possible. Members come from all over the country to attend and always look forward to this as being one big "get together" event of the year for the showmen. The prices of the tickets will be the same as last year, \$5.00 per plate, and as soon as it was announced about 150 tickets were subscribed for on the spot.

Edwin Hanneford, the great pantomime circus clown, has made the hit of the season in the great Hippodrome in New York City and while he has been famous as a pantomime clown for some years, both in Europe and in this country, it was only a few days ago that he made the hit of his life and set all of New York talking about his part as "Dick Deadeye."

Edwin Hanneford, the clown equestrian at the Hippodrome appeared in the part of "Dick Deadeye," in the condensed version of *Pinafore* given, and created roars of laughter by his portrayal of that character. Hanneford has taken the leading role in many English pantomimes and was well known as a comedian in England. Although he has been received with great favor as a clown equestrian, he wishes to show his versatility and it was at his special request that he was allowed to play Dick Deadeye Saturday night.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert O. Stickney, who are taking up their old home in

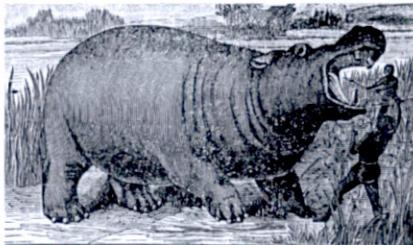
Cincinnati, Ohio, writes of a letter he received from an old man whom he had never seen and this letter tells of all the famous riders including Mr. and Mrs. Stickney who the writer had seen with the different circuses including Bob Stickney's father, who he said he saw ride with L. B. Lentz circus in New York in 1868. In this letter, he named more than half a dozen riders from that time up to the present and among them were at least six with whom I had traveled with years ago, namely: Chas. W. Fish, James Robinson, Robert Stickney and several others who long ago passed over the divide. The writer states that although he had not known these people personally, he had been interested in the circus business ever since he was a boy of 12 years of age and they mean the same to him now as they did more than half a century ago, and the names are still fresh in his mind. Although the writer had never seen Mr. Stickney and begged his pardon for writing so long a letter to a man who he had never met, Mr. Stickney prizes the letter very highly and takes great pride in showing it to his friends. He immediately wrote his new made friend and told him how he appreciated receiving a letter from an entire stranger who took such an interest in the business and further stated that he hoped in the near future to meet him personally so that they might rehearse over the old days when the circus meant so much to the youngsters and when there were so many famous riders while today there are but few.

December 28, 1918

A few days ago Dennis Hayes of Milton Junction showed me a letter which he had just received from his brother, John Hayes, and wife, of Hynes, Cal., announcing the arrival of a baby boy at their home. John Hayes left Rock County many years ago for the far west after spending his boyhood days on what was known in the early days at the "Halfway Farm" between Milton Junction and Janesville. Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Hayes settled there in the early days and whether a stranger or an old friend came there, they would always receive a warm welcome at the Hayes homestead.

It was along in the middle '70's that the circus came through this country known as the Great Eastern Circus, and up to that time was one of the largest shows that had ever visited this spot of the country. This show was naturally the wonder of the country, especially to the young element, and it was shortly after their departure that all the young lads of the country organized a home talent circus which was given in a barn at the Hayes farm.

John Hayes, the writer of the letter, was the one big feature for he was the one elected to take the part of the clown. Where the wardrobe came from I do not know, but it is safe to say that it was home grown



and the best that could possibly be had at the time. Possibly the incident would never have been recalled by me if his brother, Dennis, had not shown me the letter. But up to the time that John Hayes left for the west, many of his boyhood companions would always point him out to their boy friends as the best circus clown that ever was in this country who had never put in a full season with the big circus.

As the Hayes family, at that time, was a large one and mostly boys, it is safe to say that half of the great athletes and performers in the show given in the barn on the Hayes farm was given by the Hayes boys. What the admission fee was and the amount of the receipts, I am unable to give you, but it is safe to say that up to that time, this was the largest and best home talent circus in Rock County. John Hayes left here something like forty years ago for the far west, and I am glad to say that he has prospered in his new home.

The following letter was one of my valued Christmas presents for enclosed was a check for \$5.00 to buy a box of Christmas smokes. If you should happen to see smoke curling from our domicile, don't turn in the fire alarm, for it will only be a smoke

from one of Mike Tobin's dear Havanas. Who would not appreciate such a Christmas present?

Mr. D. W. Watt, Janesville, Wis. Friend Dave: "While in Omaha last week an old Janesville boy called my attention to your write-up of myself in the *Gazette* of December 14th for which I want to thank you very much.

"I told Mrs. Tobin that it was little I thought when I was roughing in the circus life that I would see such nice things said about me nearly forty years after.

"Now, Dave, I think you smoke, as I remember you handed me a smoke when last we parted so am enclosing the wherewithal to get a Christmas smoke on me. Everyone has a choice brand and as I do not know what yours is am doing it this way; am also enclosing stamps for a few copies of the *Gazette* of December 14th.

"I again thank you and wish you a Merry Christmas, Sincerely yours, M. L. Tobin

Al G. Barnes and Abbott Kinney, the founder and "Doge" of Venice, Cal., have gone into the ranching business on a large scale, and being in the show business and men of affairs in a large way, they are using large methods of cultivation. On a large tract of land adjacent to Venice, California, Barnes and Kinney may be seen daily, taking turns with each other riding on a string of plows behind six of the Al G. Barnes circus elephants. The huge beasts seemingly take kindly to plowing and make no more of the load than a baby dragging a pasteboard box.

The opening Wednesday evening of the Christmas Tree Festival and Animal Circus at the Chicago Coliseum was an auspicious event and the big building was crowded, main floor and balconies being jammed to capacity. It is estimated that about 20,000 children and adults were on hand for the festivities. General Manager Thomas P. Convey was congratulated by all on the successful opening of the big annual Christmas Festival. The front of the building was covered with thousands of scenic effects to great advantage while the decorations in the interior of the building were wonderful from ground floor to ceiling. Stars twinkled in the sky and myri-

ads of soft, subdued lights made it one of the most beautiful sights ever seen. Every detail was carried out to minute perfection and every point harmonized throughout. A twelve foot Santa Claus was on hand to welcome his little friends and pass out presents. Major Fred Bennett filled the role to perfection. John Agee, prince of equestrian directors, presented his ten-act circus and every one was a knockout. It is probably the best one-ring circus ever gotten together, with every act on the bill a feature. The show consists of Robinson's Herd of Military Elephants, Madam Bedini's Four High School Horses, etc. The clowns never played to a more appreciative audience and the children fairly screamed with joy at their funny antics. This is all free with the price of admission, and if this show doesn't pack the Coliseum nightly, it will be a strange thing.

The concessions all did a rushing business. Mort Wescott's Ferris Wheel, Allato's Whip, Litt's Merry-Go-Round, Velare Bros. Crazy House and Honeymoon Trail Goats and soft drinks make up an excellent midway.

It's a great show, put on by real showmen, and judging from the opening night will be a big success from every standpoint.

January 4, 1919

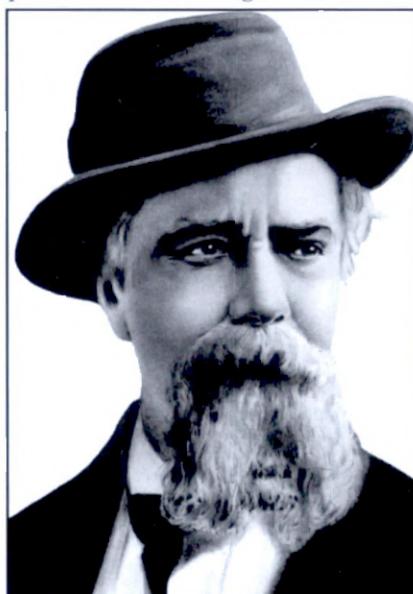
It is learned on excellent authority that the Ringling Brothers are seriously contemplating an invasion of Europe, the intention being for the big combined Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey shows to open at Olympia on Boxing Day, December 26, 1919 for a season of six weeks, after which the "Greatest Show on Earth" will jump to Paris for a similar engagement.

For this proposed trip no cages or wagons would be transported to the other side, the animals all being carried in shifting boxes, temporary cages being erected over there. About all that the show would take over, in addition to the animals, would be the ring stock and the performers. The Ringlings are considering that this would be a most opportune time for a return engagement of the great American circus in the English and French metropolis.

It is understood that preliminary

arrangements for the big circus have been entrusted to Charles Bornhaupt, the agent, who is sailing immediately for the other side.

John and Alf T. Ringling have left for Florida for several weeks, so that it was impossible to get in touch with these magnates, but the foregoing information comes from a very trustworthy source, and it appears to be a very bright business move on the part of the circus kings.



"Uncle" John Robinson, the original.

The winter quarters of the combined shows at Bridgeport, Connecticut, are bristling with activity getting the outfit ready for the coming season's tour of the United States.

Fred Bradna will be the equestrian director, with John Agee as assistant. Doctor William Shields also has been re-engaged.

The department of publicity will be composed of the following: Jay Rial, Wilbur Williams, Col. E. P. Norwood and J. E. Donaldson.

Earl Shipley, the first American clown with the U. S. Army in France, writes that he entertained some of his friends in the trenches just two days before the armistice was signed. He says that he sang a few songs and did a few good clown gags and was a big scream. He hopes to be back in time to troupe next season as he is longing for the sawdust again.

The fame of the Christmas Tree Festival for the benefit of the motherless children of Chicago, now run-

ning at the Coliseum, has spread far and wide and a number of delegations have come in from surrounding towns to see if all the good reports that they have been receiving are true. One of the delegations that called upon Thomas Convey, the genial and enterprising general manager of the festival, was from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a committee of the mothers of soldiers. These ladies were very enthusiastic about everything connected with the Christmas Tree Festival and complimented Mr. Convey very highly upon the bright, attractive appearance of the rides, the concessions and the circus. In fact, they could hardly find words to express their delight at the latter, and when presented to John Agee, who staged the circus, told him it was the best that they had ever seen. These ladies are now in conference with Mr. Convey, and it is more than likely that the entire festival will be moved to Milwaukee following the close of the circus here.

So far, there has not been a poor night or afternoon at the Coliseum, and the arms of Santa Claus grow weary passing out presents to thousands of little ones who pass over the bridge to meet him. Every concession is doing a good business. The one great outstanding feature of the affair, of course, is the big circus. John Agee has secured ten feature acts and has one of the best and smoothest running shows ever seen in this town. From the minute the first whistle blows and the opening act goes on, there isn't a dull moment. The shows run with the snap and ginger that Agee always puts into his work.

In making a success of this venture, now in its second year, Mr. Convey has opened a field for showmen in every large city in the country. As the pioneer of affairs of this sort, he has blazed a way that could be successfully copied and opened up a field for showmen at a time of the year which heretofore they have always considered the poorest of the entire twelve months. That there is a demand for these Christmas festivals is shown by the fact that so many have come in from other towns to look this one over and that offers have been made to have them go to these cities. Another year should see



Jeremiah J. Mugivan, 1873-1930.

many of these celebrations during the month of December.

January 11, 1919

As I look back over the years of long ago, in the days when all showmen looked alike to me, and to the opening of the great Forepaugh show early in March in Madison Square Garden, New York, where we would show for eight weeks, there was one time in particular and that was the first year that I sold tickets in New York. My office was on what was known as the Fourth Avenue end of the building. It was in that office that all the general admission tickets were sold. The Barnum show had about four ticket sellers with four special offices in that end of the building. As Adam Forepaugh had a lease on the building, he told me to fix the ticket office to suit myself, and if I thought I could sell all the tickets by remodeling the office and making a larger door to see through, to use my own judgment. This I did, and by making a window which was large enough to see through, so that there were always plenty of hands with money ready, it did not make hard work for one person. The first afternoon I went through the building to the main office on Madison Avenue, where I turned in my money to the general treasurer. I will never forget the famous showmen that were there to visit the opening of the big show--P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey, J. E. Cooper, James Hutchinson, W. W.

Cole, two of the Sells brothers from Columbus, Ohio, Egbert and Elias [Elbert] Howes of Howes' Great London show--all men famous in the business for years. It was possibly the largest group of famous showmen ever grouped together at one time. Yet there was one missing and one who possibly never saw a performance in Madison Square Garden, and that was old "Uncle" John Robinson of Cincinnati, Ohio. I call him "Uncle" John for the reason that every bootblack, millionaire and banker of Cincinnati called him "Uncle" John for more than half a century.

It was later in the season that the Forepaugh show opened in Cincinnati for four days, arriving there early on Tuesday morning. As I had nothing to do Sunday afternoon, I walked over to Uncle John Robinson's home on Vine Street, where I spent the afternoon visiting with the old showman. To me that afternoon was one of the most interesting of my life. While Uncle John had a rough exterior, he was kind-hearted and a good visitor, and he went back to his early days in the business which was along about the time that the Barnum & Forepaugh entered the business. The name of "Robinson" is still prominent before the people, although Uncle John passed to the world beyond years ago. In many ways, Uncle John was not different from Adam Forepaugh, for he would get out early in the spring and many times make a long run closing the season well toward the holidays.

The Robinson show for many years was famous all through the southern country and for many years would go through the south late in the season and take more money in than any other show in the business. Every season Uncle John would bring hundreds of thousands of dollars back to his home city Cincinnati. Early in his career he built one of the finest Grand Opera Houses which still stands in Cincinnati as a monument to his name. Like Adam Forepaugh, he put most of his earnings in business blocks in Cincinnati which to Uncle John Robinson meant more than all other cities put together.

Uncle John in politics was a Democrat, and although Cincinnati



Bert C. Bowers, 1874-1936.

was mostly Republican, many of the leading Democrats of the city thought that on account of the thousands of dollars that "Uncle John" had put into the buildings in Cincinnati, possibly more than any other man, that the businessmen in particular would be glad to vote for "Uncle John" for mayor. At first the old man shook his head and said no politics for him, yet his Democratic friends would not listen to him and told him of the great benefit that he had been to the city and that the majority of the men would be glad to compliment him with the office for at least one term. Finally Uncle John consented to make the run, but to make a long story short, when the votes were counted, Uncle John was snowed under so deep that they never tried to resurrect him politically again. To humiliate him all the more, the Republican leaders the following day took a donkey on the streets with a blanket covering him and the inscription on the blanket read: "Uncle John Robinson on his way home after election." No man, friend or foe, ever dared to say "politics" to Uncle John again. But Uncle John's heart was in the right place and many poor people during the holidays received thousands and thousands of dollars from Uncle John to help them through the cold winter.

I well recollect one Christmas that Uncle John gave a dinner to all the newsboys of Cincinnati, and while he was not a public speaker, he gave

them a little talk after the banquet and in closing said that he was talking to some lads who later would occupy a seat in Congress or possibly become President of the United States.

Uncle John had some four or five sons, but for some years I have lost track of all of the boys except Gilbert, who was the oldest of the sons and is still living in Cincinnati and is a man of wealth and prominence in the business circle. He only had one daughter and she married Robert Stickney, the famous rider. She passed away many years ago. This story is only a memory of long ago, much of which has gone down into history.

A surprise was sprung in the circus world Saturday when, at a receiver's sale at French Lick, Indiana, the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus passed into the hands of Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, owners of the John Robinson circus and the Howes' Great London shows.

The sale was conducted Saturday afternoon, December 28, at the French Lick Springs Hotel, sealed bids being presented. The price paid by Mugivan & Bowers, it is understood, was \$36,100, and it is the general opinion that these enterprising showmen secured a bargain. The second highest bid was that of John Ringling. There were several other bids on the property, but none was offered by Ed Ballard, former owner of the majority of the stock in the circus corporation.

The Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Show Company, which operated the circus, was put into the hands of a receiver, John R. Ward, several months ago and the announcement made that the property would be sold. At that time the opinion seemed to be among circus people that Mr. Ballard or some of the other stockholders would bid on the show, but it was generally understood by Mr. Ballard's friends that he would retire from the circus business, which took up a large part of his time, and devote himself entirely to his large hotel and other interests.

No statement has been made by Mugivan & Bowers as to their plans for the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus, but it is thought that they will continue its operation under the same title and use about the same number of cars as in the past few seasons.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace circus has had more than its share of bad luck the past few seasons, culminating in the disastrous wreck near Gary, Indiana last June. Mr. Ballard, in the few years he was in the business, showed a pronounced aptitude for the show business and season after season overcame difficulties that would have haunted the courage of the most experienced. His retiring is a distinct loss to the show world.



Lithograph used by the Greatest Show on Earth in 1919.

Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers are considered the most progressive and able of the younger generation of circus men. They have worked their way up from the bottom until today with the circus, they are second only to the Ringling Brothers in this field.

January 18, 1919

For weeks back all kinds of rumors have been afloat as to the possibility of the Ringlings starting out two or more shows the coming season. An interview with Charles Ringling has settled the matter without any question, for the knowing ones were satisfied that the great Ringling and Barnum & Bailey would be consolidated for the coming season. Then the rumor was started that they would put out the great Forepaugh & Sells show, and as they owned the title to both these shows, many believe this might come to pass. But when interviewing Charles Ringling,

he simply shook his head and said: "Nothing doing, the only show that we will be interested in the coming season will be known as the great Ringling & Bailey show combined, and although there will be a few others of the smaller shows which have been gradually growing larger for some years, there will be only two great shows the coming season. They will be the Ringling combined with the Barnum & Bailey and Hagenbeck-Wallace." Yet there is the Sparks Brothers show, one of the smaller ones which has been gradually growing every year until it is now counted as a rival to a certain extent, and for some years has been considered a high class show. Yet one

might say that with the country full of money, this should be one of the greatest seasons for the shows for the reason that the public is ready to spend money for entertainment. With many this is true, but the public is more exacting today in the way of quality than ever before. The show with a reputation of a high standard will

make much money the coming season and also get the highest price of admission, but they must save the quality.

Lew Graham, announcer and manager of the privileges with the Ringling show, is now in New York making contracts for the coming season and will be located there until the opening of the combined shows in Madison Square Garden which will probably be early in March.

Plans for the big annual banquet and ball of the Showmen's League of America are about completed and everything is going along fine. The affair will be held in the Gold Room of the Congress Hotel on Wednesday evening, February 19. Edward P. Newman, chairman of the executive committee, has already received a check for his first ticket, and at a meeting of the league last evening, reservations were handed in for over 200 tickets. However, in order that New York Club No. 2 and out-of-town friends and members may receive good seats, no place will be designat-

ed until all are heard from. It is now up to the members to write in as soon as possible and let the committee know how many seats to reserve.

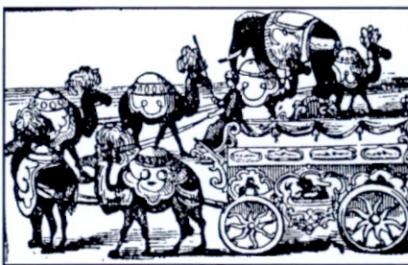
Programmed in regulation style, the Greatest Show on Earth Today, the circus presented by the men of the camouflage section, with the American Forces in France, stationed in Dijon, at the Cirque Tivoli, lacked none of the thrills of a genuine American greatest show on earth—that is, if starting announcements of the program were fulfilled. Opening with a concert by the entire company of some sixty-five regular troopers, there were dances, bull fights, aerial and ground acts, juggling, black art, "sensational chariot races of fearless riders from all parts of the world," not overlooking the "grand combat de boxe" by two American mitt artists, and in fact, every sort of an act presented by the American circus. The program was the work of an artist—a press agent who acquired his art through his affiliation with the sawdust arena.

About two hundred and fifty members of the Showmen's League of America and the Ladies' Auxiliary gathered in the league club rooms on New Year's for the purpose of seeing to it that the new year was ushered in with proper pomp and ceremony. The members and their families began arriving early and were made welcome by Edward C. Talbott, president of the league, acting as host, and Mrs. Nat Reiss, Chairman of the Ladies' Auxiliary, acting as hostess. After the formal greeting, they were turned over to the friendly bunch of "Leaguers" and "Auxiliaries" who immediately proceeded to make the families of the members feel right at home.

During the course of the evening, excellent entertainment was provided, including several numbers by Tom Brown's Saxophone Sextette, Frank Person, pianist; Lieutenant Pilot Bert Zahn and Private Bentley of the Canadian Army. Bentley saw three year's service in France and although made a prisoner by the Germans, made his escape. He demonstrated his ability to get out of handcuffs, chains and straitjackets.

Mr. and Mrs. Doll of the dancing midgets, features of Ringling Brothers sideshow, fox trotted and

two-stepped to the great delight of everyone. There was dancing by the members and a wonderful lunch served by the auxiliary. A huge table was arranged in the form of a "T," and this had to be set three times before all were served. A welcome addition to the "eats" furnished by the ladies was a donation of five gallons of oysters by W. S. Hephrey. These were served in the form of oyster cocktails and were a big hit. Another welcome donation was several gallons of Harry McKay's famous apple cider. This cider, fruit punch and coffee were the only liquid refreshments served.



The committees performed wonders in getting all of the arrangements made in time as they only had three days in which to do the work, but they were fully equal to the task set for them. When the doors opened the last little detail had been attended to properly. The walls and ceilings were handsomely decorated with streamers, banners, wreaths, cherubs and American flags, donated by A. R. Hodge and George Schmidt of Riverview Park. Henry Moses, wellknown caterer, presided at the carving table and demonstrated his efficiency and ability in a remarkable manner.

Promptly at 12 o'clock the new year was ushered in with a wild tooting of horns and other noisemakers, and an exchange of New Year's greeting all around. On the first stroke of twelve, the lights were darkened, and an electric sign containing the words, "Happy New Year, 1919" and with an American flag on each end, flashed its greetings forth. This was donated by Fay Frankenstein and made a big hit.

The members and their families and friends danced and made merry until 2 a.m. when Home, Sweet Home brought to a close one of the best and most enjoyable affairs ever held at the club rooms.

January 25, 1919

The following notice appeared on the *Billboard* last week of a meeting of three men who have been famous in circus business for many years, men that I have known for many years and one in particular with whom I put in a year at the Adam Forepaugh show in 1889. That man is Willard D. Coxey, and so far as I know, he has never missed a season since that time. He has always been with the circus during the summer. In the winter when not on the road, I would notice at different times high-class articles in the different magazines written by Willard D. Coxey.

"A trio of erstwhile well-known circus men met in Toronto during the past week. They were W. L. Wilken, for several years with the Barnum & Bailey show and now head of "Oh, Boy;" Willard D. Coxey, long associated with the advance of Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey, and the 101 Ranch shows and now with Harry Lauder, and Fred Bussey, for many years with the old Sells-Forepaugh show and at present managing the Gaiety Theater. It is reported that it was some gabfest."

It's the "right lower exit" for German agencies which virtually controlled the animal market prior to the war.

"We are through with them for all time," Dr. W. T. Hornaday, director of the New York Zoological Park said. "While I do not speak for the executive committee, I feel certain that German agents never again will supply animals for the New York Zoo."

To take the place of the Hagenbecks and other German wild animal companies, the world's Zoological Trading Company was organized recently in London. It will have agents in every part of the world. It is the result of a suggestion by Dr. Hornaday.

This new trading company will deliver animals direct to its agencies, one of which will be in New York City. The Duke of Bedford, G. Tyrwhitt-Drake, Mayor of Maidstone and Dr. O. Chalmers Mitchell, secretary of the London Zoological Society, are officers of the company.

F. T. Corcoran of Ft. Morgan, Colorado, secretary-manager of the Ft. Morgan Frontier Days celebra-

tion, who is going overseas as a Knights of Columbus secretary, has laid before William P. Larkin, director of Knights of Columbus overseas activities, a proposition to send to France a wild west show with a sufficient number of cowboys, cowgirls, Indians, bucking horses, etc., to give a series of exhibitions for the soldiers and sailors of the United States expeditionary forces.

Mr. Cocoran's offer has no strings to it. He figures that it would cost about \$250,000 to finance his plan and keep the show over there about three months. He states that the citizens of Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico want to contribute this fund as their bit towards entertaining our fighters abroad.

In speaking of the project, Mr. Cocoran said: "It will not cost the K. of C. a penny and not a penny will be accepted from our soldiers abroad. We will give ninety performances abroad, if necessary, and pay our own expenses from the day we leave the west until the day we return to the west.

"If the Knights of Columbus want us to give a series of performances in or near the big cities of France and charge admission, the entire gross proceeds to go to any charity the Knights may select, we will be glad to do it. We people of Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico are anxious to show our appreciation of the American soldiers and select this method of doing it.

"The principal owner of this show we propose to send over is patriotic and wealthy and stands ready to dig deep into his own bankroll if the Knights see fit to accept our offer."

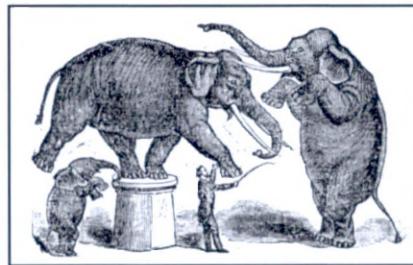
Mr. Larkin appeared impressed and gratified over Mr. Corcoran's offer and indicated that the matter would receive careful consideration.

Mr. Corcoran is hopeful that the Knights of Columbus will accept the offer. If they don't, he will sail next week to begin his secretary work in France. If they do, he may be asked to postpone going until final arrangements have been made to send him across.

Mr. Corcoran is one of the best-known contest managers in the country. It was largely through his efforts that the Western Frontier Contest association, organized for the pur-

pose of furthering the wild west contest business, was formed.

Fred Stone's new picture, Under the Top, is a great disappointment. Some scenario writers fondly imagine that a few circus wagons, riders and clowns are all that is required to make a picture. The great circus picture is yet to be produced. Someone who really knows and understands the circus business could travel with one of the big shows and write a five-reeler every day during the season, the material for the purpose being unlimited. The late William C. Thompson, for many years press agent for Barnum & Bailey, wrote a circus scenario which is now in the possession of his widow. This story, it is said, really exploits the true circus atmosphere. The title of Stone's latest efforts, Under the Top, is a misnomer, such an expression never having been used in the circus world.



Earl Shipley, the well-known clown, writes from Echternach, Germany: "Dear Friend Solly—just a line to let my friends of the white tops know that I am still in the game. Am in Germany with the American Army of occupation and will be on the banks of the Rhine when you receive this. Have been in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany for a year now and am hoping to be back in Clown Alley when the bluebirds sing next season. Was in every American drive from the first one in July until the armistice was signed and saw some real action. Haven't seen a *Billboard* for weeks and don't know what is going on in the circus world. Have met a few troupers over here and they are all planning on getting back to the game next season. My best wishes to the *Billboard*!"

February 1, 1919

On Monday last, January 27, the world's two greatest shows "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey combined" opened the season in Madison

Square Garden, New York. [In fact, the opening date was March 29.]

This is by far the earliest opening ever known by any circus in the great city. In 1886, the Buffalo Bill show opened there in December for a winter's run under the management of Adam Forepaugh, but this was not a financial success and an all winter's show there, as far as I know, was never attempted again.

On account of the war, New York City has been crowded with strangers for several months and I look for the opening of the two great shows combined to be a great success. While it would be a long run, it is never considered safe for the big shows to open much before the first of May under canvas. Yet the public seems to have plenty of money to pay for high-class entertainment and the combined circuses should put up the greatest circus ever known in the country. The *Billboard*, which is the official circus and theatrical magazine of the country, states that there will be six shows starting out of Philadelphia this season, three of which will be circuses, and the other three carnival companies who will make one-week stands. Ever since 1864 when Adam Forepaugh organized the first big circus in Philadelphia that city of brotherly love has always been the winter quarters of one or more circuses and also the winter quarters of many people in all kinds of business. As a rule, the shows wintering there will open for a run from one to two weeks and from there to Baltimore for about three days and then to Washington, D.C. for three days more and then, as a rule, take to the one-day stands. In 1881 the Adam Forepaugh show opened in Washington, D.C. on April 6th which was on Thursday and a parade left the show grounds about 9:30 in the morning in a blinding snow storm, but in the afternoon it cleared away and the show had three days of big business.

From Washington we went to Baltimore for three days, then made two-day and one-day stands and on Saturday opened in Philadelphia for a run of two weeks and one day. So, by this time it was about May first when we took to the one-day stands under canvas.

A few days ago an old friend of

more than thirty years ago (then in circus business) came to Janesville last week as general agent of "Hearts of the World" which is one of the greatest moving pictures. Frank Hurst for several years was an advance agent of the Walter Main circus which was a wagon show and traveled mainly through the east. Frank Hurst started in the business when a boy of 17. Since that time he has traveled the world over. He was with the Cooper & Bailey show which was the first circus to make a trip around the world. Some fifteen or sixteen years ago he was with the Barnum & Bailey show in Europe, and he is one of the most interesting characters to talk to that I have ever met.

The following letter from the government to John Agee and Oscar Lowande is one of special interest. John Agee, for many years, has been equestrian director of the great Ringling show and Oscar Lowande his rival, who has been famous the world over for many years. I traveled with the Lowande family, three in particular, more than thirty years ago when Oscar Lowande and his sister Julia were two of the famous riders of the country. They were both with the Adam Forepaugh show and were high class in their business and a credit to any show with whom they were connected. I have not seen Oscar for many years, but the last time when the Barnum & Bailey show visited Janesville under the management of James A. Bailey, Julia Lowande was the principal bareback rider: "John Agee and Oscar Lowande have both received certificates from the United States Government setting forth the official recognition of the splendid work these two showmen did during the closing days of the great Liberty Loan Drive, when they organized many circus acts and presented such an array of startling features that it stood Chicago on tiptoes with thrillers, while the workers extracted the money for bonds and which greatly aided in putting Chicago over with such a rush."

Oscar Lowande has engaged Johnny Robinson and his elephants for the coming season and will tour the New England states with the

Lowande circus. Mr. Lowande will put out an up-to-date, one-ring wagon show which he hopes to organize as the basis of presenting such acts as will be worthy of featuring.

Donald Hopkins writes from somewhere in Belgium: "After reading Billyboy over and over again, I pass them on to Henry Maitland, the frog man formerly connected with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. Maitland is a sergeant in the 346th Machine Gun Battalion, Co. B. I have met several troupers over here. I was in Ghent, Belgium a few weeks ago (letter dated Dec. 17th) and ran into Bento Brothers who was on the Ringling show for several seasons. He has been a prisoner behind the German lines for four and a half years. He wished to be remembered to his friends. Best wishes to all for a prosperous season."

A great reunion was that recently held when Walter Gollmar of Baraboo, Wisconsin and of Gollmar circus fame, and Walter B. Gentry, formerly of the Gentry show, but who is now one of the substantial and progressive citizens of Hot Spring, met at the office of the United States Employment Bureau in this city.

Were they looking for work? They were not. Walter Gentry is at the head of the employment office for this district, while Walter Gollmar is in Hot Springs for a good long rest and to take the kinks from his muscles, stiffened by many weary nights on wet lots and built up after the recent strenuous season.

The two Walters put in a busy evening recalling this and that old-timer in the circus game, many of whom had been visitors to the Springs and going over rich and rare experiences in the great outdoor amusement game, the experience gained and at the same time both declared as Gentry expressed it: "All the dappled-gray horses in all the circuses could not pull them back."

Incidentally, a local horseman has announced that he has a promising colt which he had named "Walter G." As this fits both the Walters, it is thought they will both claim the honor while if he proves to be a "frost", each of them can claim the horse is named for the other Walter G.

February 8, 1919

It was something like thirty years ago that the Barnum show commenced to gather in other shows, possibly with but one advantage in view--to combine those that would sooner or later become dangerous rivals. The first one to be taken over was the W. W. Cole show. The first year Mr. Cole was given the management of the Barnum & Bailey show. It was along in 1888 and 1889 that P. T. Barnum and his wife came on to the Adam Forepaugh show for a week's visit, but it was known at that time that the reason was to see if arrangements could be made to combine the two great shows. But Adam Forepaugh from the start to the finish in show business never had a partner and would not listen to anything of the kind.

Adam Forepaugh died on January 24, 1890, and in his will the show had to be sold for the most that it would bring with the money to be divided between the young widow and son. It was then that James A. Bailey of the Barnum show and J. E. Cooper, a former partner, who a few years prior to this had retired, made a bid for the show. Later it was opened in Philadelphia under the old title of the Adam Forepaugh show, with James A. Bailey and J. E. Cooper as proprietors, and Joseph T. McCaddon, who was Mrs. Barnum's [Bailey's] brother, as manager.

Up to this time there were seven large shows in the country, all of which had been gradually gathered in by Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. until today they owned them all. This summer we will see but the one great show on the road under the name of Barnum & Bailey, and Ringling Bros., the Ringlings having taken over the Barnum & Bailey, Adam Forepaugh, Sells Brothers, W. W. Cole shows and others. These were all the great shows of 30 or 35 years ago with the exception of the Montgomery Queen show, the Van Amburgh show and Howes' Great London show. These three shows in turn went to the wall and were sold out.

What will become of what is known as "the old-timers" around those different shows from actors down to the canvasmen and the big team drivers is a question.

In 1886 the Adam Forepaugh show opened in Philadelphia for a two weeks' run and on Saturday night before the opening of the show, they gave a torchlight parade which was over a mile long and one of the greatest parades Philadelphia had ever seen. At the head of every cage and tableau and bandwagon in the parade were four torch bearers. There were 29 elephants with the show all that season and in those days there was no trouble in getting what was known as "big team drivers," men who were able to hold the lines over eight and ten-horse teams with as much ease and assurance as the average man of today would drive a pair.

After all the years that I was there, many of the same old drivers were there and with the exception of now and then a horse injured or killed, many of them had their same teams and the same men as helpers to care for them and hitch up and unhitch before and after the parade and also for the loading at night. The torchlight parade was formed on Broad Street near the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad crossing which was possibly two miles away from the principal part of the city. The torch bearers that night were men hired for that purpose, each one receiving 50 cents and a ticket for the show. But for several years past, those great drivers have passed away and the big shows being taken over under one management has driven many of them into other lines of business. It seems to me that the most self-reliant and independent show that ever was on the road was the Adam Forepaugh show, for the manager was always the real head of his department. Whatever he said went.

In the spring before the show opened, if anyone came up to the show without funds and went to Mr. Forepaugh, he would say: "Go to the wagon to Dave and he will look after you."

I would not be surprised if the circus business from the parade to the entire show, including the loading and unloading of the trains, would eventually come into the films. It will be impossible this year for the combined Ringling and Barnum & Bailey shows to cover the entire country unless they should make long runs



John "Pogey" O'Brien.

and exhibit only in the larger cities and excursion people from a distance.

A few years ago I met the man who was one of the cooks with the Barnum & Bailey show, who in my time in the business, was the waiter in the old Bingham House in Philadelphia, where I made headquarters some two or three weeks every spring and fall. He said: "Mr. Watt, you must recollect Old Tom, the big fellow who was the head waiter of the Bingham House at that time, for he was the one that would always greet you first in the dining rooms in the spring when you came and tell you that he had been saying 'Yuh same ol' place at de table and yuh same ol' waitah.' Old Tom was a great usher and got many a tip from people by making them think that they were the ones that he was particularly interested in."

The annual banquet of the Showmen's League of America will be held in the gold room of the Congress Hotel, Chicago, Wednesday noon, February 19.

Now the circus comes to the legitimate stage. Klaw & Erlanger, in association with George T. Tyler, have placed in rehearsal a comedy of the circus and the race track, entitled "Live Forever." L. B. Yates is the author of the play which had its genesis in short stories that appeared in Hearst's Magazine and the *Saturday Evening Post*. The play concerns a

trio of race track followers and Mlle. Maude Mazurka of the circus and abounds in clever comedy. Marie Nordstrom will be seen in the leading feminine role whom the three principal male characters are taken by, Capt. William Harrigan, George Howell and James Lackaye.

February 15, 1919

Word from the United States Awning Company, Chicago, says that the orders for new tents of all kinds from the menagerie and the big top, down to the horse tents and sideshows, are larger than they have been for some years. Although there will be only two or three of the extra large ones like the Ringling and Barnum & Bailey combined and the Hagenbeck-Wallace, we count there will be more of the smaller shows on the road this spring than ever before.

Richard T. Ringling, New York, son of Alfred Ringling of the Barnum show, is getting together what might be called a "round up" of all the famous cowboys of the world. His idea is to give exhibitions with different companies of these famous riders and rope throwers from all over the United States and later in the season gather them all together and give a big round-up meeting in Madison Square Garden, New York. In the final round up, only the top notchers in the business will be allowed to compete.

I have told you of the opening of the Forepaugh show in New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore and the big business and the smooth way in which the show ran, and the reception it received from the public, but we must not get the idea that it was all sunshine in the circus business from start to finish, for when a show the size of the Forepaugh show starts from California to Maine and back again, you are bound to see a few dark days and rough places on the road.

One of these dark days came to us in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1887. The Pogey O'Brien show had exhibited there on Saturday, and all the men that were working in the big smelting works were on a strike and many of them were drinking heavily. The O'Brien show was finally cut down by a mob Saturday evening and two of the men working with the show were

killed. The Forepaugh show pulled into the town early Sunday morning and while we had a license which called for protection, the city seemed to be in the hands of a mob. The chief of police and the mayor were at the station Sunday morning when our trains pulled in and immediately sent for Mr. Forepaugh and told him that the town was in the hands of a mob, that the police were unable to cope with them and for him not to unload his show as they would not give him protection.

If Adam Forepaugh was anything, he was fearless and finally said to the mayor and chief, "If you will call my license off and give me permission, I will show there tomorrow afternoon and night and guarantee that I will protect myself or stand the loss."

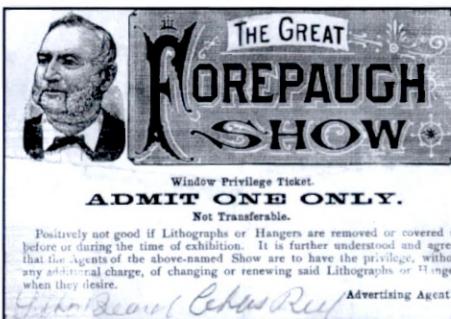
This seemed to please the chief and mayor and in a few minutes, the show was unloading and pulling onto the lot. A few of the strikers gathered at the show grounds and got busy insulting ladies in different ways, but no attention was paid to them. The stakes were driven for the big top, the canvas set up and everything was in readiness to raise the canvas when there were something like 75 or more strikers on the canvas. Dan Taylor, boss canvasman, asked them to get out so the canvas could be raised, but they told him where he could go and said they would walk off when they got ready.

There were between 400 and 500 men with the show, and they were well-organized and expecting trouble. It seemed to be not more than a minute until these men were out in every direction with big stakes with iron bands on them. For a minute or two the fight was so fast and furious that a few more strikers came to the show ground, but were forbidden admission, were made to keep their distance and given to understand that the show in every way was able to protect itself against all odds. This they seemed to take for granted for when the show opened Monday afternoon, there was a line-up of showmen, well armed, from the front door out to the street. Although it took some time to get the fast crowd in, the tent was packed to the ring bank both afternoon and evening, everyone passing in single file.

It was a little less than two years later that a flood came and swept away thousands. There was a high railway bridge which reached from one side of the valley to the other and this bridge was finally swept away with nearly, if not quite, 3,000 men, women and children who had gathered there for safety. At the time of the great flood, we were billed to show there about two weeks later, and we did a big business as there were thousands of people there from many miles around.

Mr. Forepaugh turned over half of the receipts of the show to the widows and orphans of the city.

I was the only one that worked afternoon and evening with the show, looking after the front door. The counting of the tickets and money was left to the businessmen of the town.



A pass issued by the Forepaugh Show in the 1880s.

In those days there were few towns that the circus did not have to fight its way in and out. But this was 35 years ago or more and the conditions are very much different now.

"MANY OF THE ANIMALS Of the Hagenbeck (European) Circus Slaughtered for Food"

The following information concerning the Hagenbeck circus, the original Hamburg institution conducted by the world famous animal dealers, was contained in an Associated Press dispatch by a correspondent with the American Army off occupation in and about Coblenz, Germany, January 26, viz: "The Americans in the occupied zone are to receive an opportunity to see Hagenbeck's trained animals on a war basis. Before the war Hagenbeck had more than 800 animals, but these had been reduced in number so that when the circus

arrived in Coblenz, it had only 100 specimens.

"Camels, llamas and many other animals had been killed since the war started, owing to the scarcity of food. Fifteen elephants of a herd of thirty remain. The other elephants were killed last winter and the meat was sold to civilians in the interior of Germany, where the circus was exhibiting.

"The circus was permitted to enter the occupied area on the provision that the meat-eating animals would be fed with the carcasses of horses and other animals which are considered unfit for human consumption.

"Carl Hagenbeck is with the circus. The first performance was given February 1." The Carl Hagenbeck referred to as being with the show may be a son or a nephew of the original Carl, but the latter died some five years since.

February 22, 1919

It was in 1882 that Burr Robbins sold his show to two men by the name of Myers and Shorb. The name of the show was changed and known as the Big United States Show and Menagerie. These men immediately started with the show, and one of their first stands, I think along the latter part of July, was in Youngstown, Ohio. This town was largely made up of workingmen, as the big smelters and steel works were located there.

Youngstown had been known for years as the "tough town" for a circus to show in unless it was big enough to protect itself. At different times these men would gather in bunches of two or three hundred and go to the circus regardless of any law or order, walk through the front door, push the door tenders to one side and, in fact, run the show to suit themselves.

Two or three weeks before we would bill a show there with the Adam Forepaugh show, the United States Circus exhibited there. It was said that between 350 and 400 of these lawless workers went into the show without tickets and without paying a cent and the management seemed to be helpless. But they made the best of it and voided trouble so far as possible. This gave the toughs of the town courage to try it on every show that came to Youngstown.

Adam Forepaugh knew what to expect and had all the workingmen, drivers and canvassers armed with big stakes, about 450 in number and declared that any man in Youngstown that wanted to see his show would have to pay admission.

It was about 8 o'clock when just about the time the grand entry was ready to open the performance, that the same band of lawless men marched to the show in a body. But just before they got ready to make a drive on the show, the showmen were turned loose on them with their stakes. Although it was after 12 o'clock at night before the last wagon belonging to the show left the show grounds, friends of the lawbreakers were still busy carrying their friends away in all kinds of vehicles. This was one night that the toughs of Youngstown met their "Waterloo."

It was weeks after that Adam Forepaugh was congratulated in person and by letter from many of the law-abiding citizens of Youngstown. Although 35 years ago, when the big shows would occasionally strike a town where the toughs thought they could run the show to suit themselves, Adam Forepaugh always seemed to be able to take care of his own show and make everybody pay admission that intended taking in the circus.

It was about a year or two later that the show came west and one day I received my contracts from the agents, headed by a letter telling me to look out for Council Bluffs, Iowa. The director's advice to me was as soon as I had breakfast in the morning of the day we were to exhibit in Council Bluffs to be sure and go to the mayor's office and pay the \$450 for the lot, etc. and offer a few complimentary tickets extra from the 50 that we would give them with the check. He also stated that we would be lucky if we got out of Council Bluffs without any trouble as the city was in the hands of the "toughs," from the mayor down.

I read the letter to Adam Forepaugh and he said: "Dave, take 50 extra tickets with you so that if they want more tickets, give them to them as above all things we do not want to have any trouble."

It was about 9 o'clock when I went over to the mayor's office where I

found the chief of police and several of the aldermen. They had all been drinking more or less, and when I told them I was there to pay for the lot and license and that Mr. Forepaugh had kindly told me that if they needed more complimentary tickets for themselves and friends, that I should give them some, the mayor said:

"How many tickets did this great Adam Forepaugh tell you to give us?" I told him: "He left that to me, but he would give you people whatever you thought you would want during the afternoon and evening performance."

"Well," said the mayor, in an overbearing manner, "how many tickets have you with you?" I told him I had 100, which was 50 more than the check called for, and they were welcome to them if they needed them for themselves and friends.

He then said: "One hundred tickets you propose to give us. Just take your money and tickets back to your employer and tell him to keep them and we will attend to his case later."

We gave the afternoon performance which was not largely attended, everything running smoothly until after the performance was over. It was about one-half hour after all the people got away from the afternoon show when a mob of nearly 100 men, led by the mayor and chief of police and other officers came with a warrant for Mr. Forepaugh.

For some years a young man by the name of Billy Andrews ran what was known as an outside candy store, which was located within a few feet of my ticket wagon. Early in Billy's life he had lost his right eye in an accident and later he had a glass eye put in, and it took a close observer to notice that it was artificial.

While Billy was a quiet young man, when it came to a "rough house" he would be the first "over the top." It was a byword about the show that when Billy Andrews took his glass eye out and put it in his vest pocket, that trouble was at hand.

Billy was the first one to see this drunken mob marching to the show and he immediately took out his eye and put it in his vest pocket. Word was passed around the show that danger was near. The fight that the showmen had there to protect themselves was so fast and furious for a little while that the main ticket office was closed and the ticket seller was sitting on the safe, wondering when quiet again would be restored. The mob was driven away and many of them had to be taken in carriages.

The evening show was not much of a success, but Council Bluffs was one town where we paid for no lot, no license and gave no complimentary tickets. The show was loaded without trouble and pulled over into Omaha, where we exhibited the next day with two of the best houses of the season.

The Omaha officers knew of the trouble we had in Council Bluffs and knew there would be a warrant there for Mr. Forepaugh that day. When the officers, three in number, came with the warrant for Mr. Forepaugh, the Omaha officers said to them:

"We will give you 30 minutes to get back into Iowa, or we will throw you in jail and keep you there until you are willing to go back home and behave yourselves."

This they did, and the show went on to other towns in Nebraska. Adam Forepaugh cut Council Bluffs from the list and never exhibited there again.

Darrell Hawkins Presents RIDE'EM AS THEY COME.

A new book. A true story. The life of John "Rusty" Tulk 1886-1977. Cowboy, Bucking horse rider, Wild West shows, Wagon shows, Circuses, Trick rider with 101 Wild West in 1907, working with Tom Mix and Bill Pickett. To England with Col. Cummings Wild West in 1908. Rode bucking horses in the second Calgary Stampede.

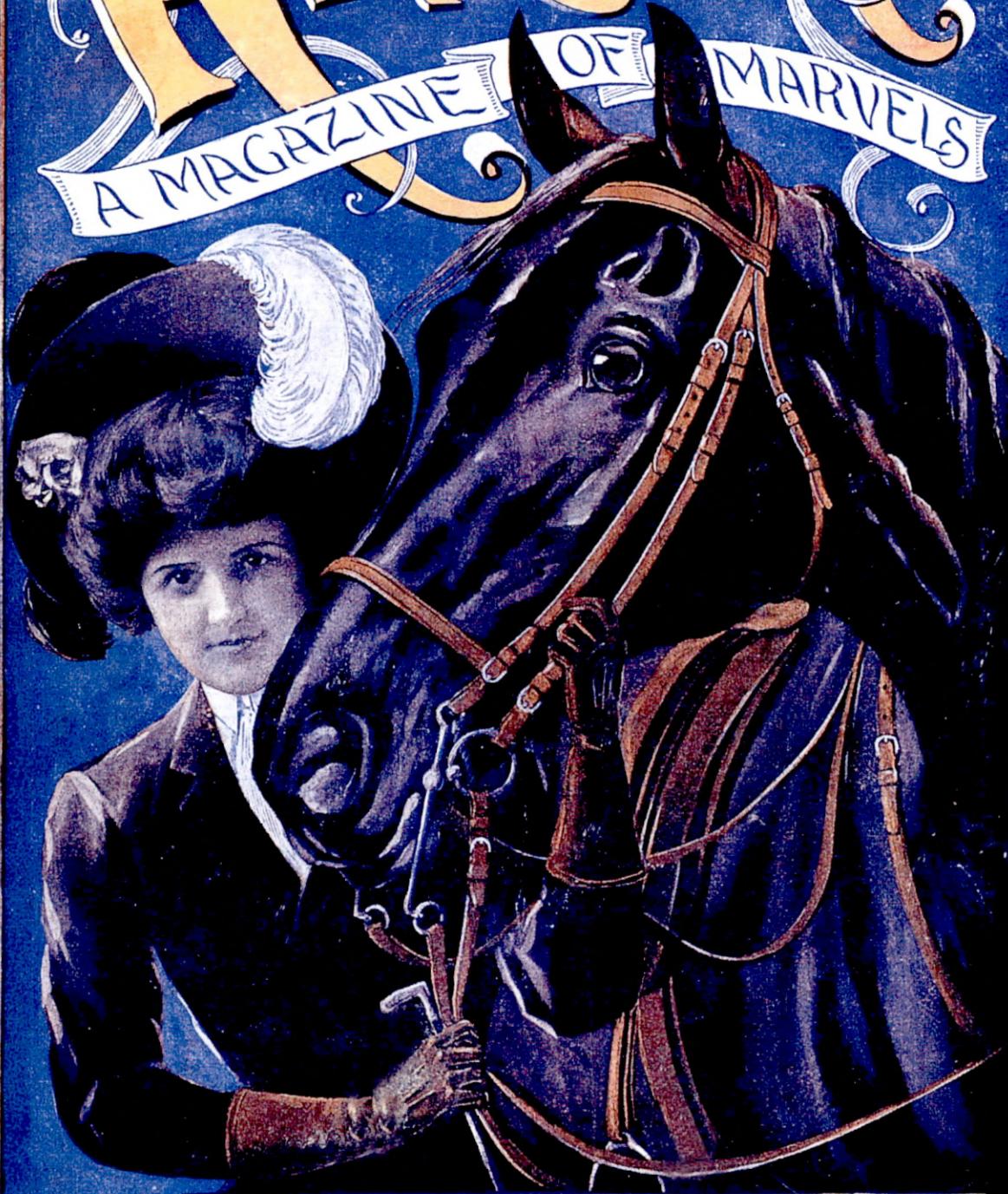
Historical value. \$20.95 pp. 193 pages

Darrell Hawkins
N.W.J PUBLISHING
2400 S. 8th St. #32
Deming, NM 88030

THE

REALM

A MAGAZINE OF MARVELS



ST. JOSEPH, Wednesday, JULY 19

COPYRIGHT 1897 BY THE CARRIER CO. BUFFALO, N.Y.